# Introduction to Literary Genres I:
Poetry and Drama

COURSE CODE: B21EG02DC

**BACHELOR OF ARTS
ENGLISH LANGUAGE
AND LITERATURE**

Self
Learning
Material

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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

Introduction to Literary Genres I: Poetry & Drama

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Semester - II

Bachelor of Arts
English Language and Literature
Self Learning Material

B21EG02DC
Introduction to Literary
Genres I: Poetry & Drama

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DOCUMENTATION

Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centres around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India. His name is a reminder for us to ensure quality in the delivery of all academic endeavours.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities.

The university is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The UG programme in English Language and Literature is designed at par with that of the quality academic programme of the state universities in the country. Due emphasis has been given to the latest trends in delivery of the programme in English Language and Literature. We dream that the programme will enhance your capabilities in understanding the language and literature as well. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

Feel free to write to us about anything that you feel relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.

Regards,
Dr. P.M. Mubarak Pasha   01.03.2023

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BLOCK - 01

Understanding
Poetry

Unit 1
Understanding Poetry:
How to Read a Poem?

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
- ▶ describe some of the predominant features of poetry
- ▶ detail the significance of the chief components of poetry
- ▶ identify different classifications of poetry
- ▶ acquire skills for reading, analysing, and appreciating poetry, creatively and critically

Prerequisites

Poetry is considered the highest form of artistic expression. Have you ever thought about how a poem works on us? It is by the capacity of the poem to move, inspire and appeal to us. What works primarily here is the imagination of the poet and the reader's emotional connection to it. Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks said "poetry is life distilled". Living in a fractured world, poetry helps readers connect with other people's realities. But sometimes, people prefer prose writings to poetry. This may be because of the poetic diction and other techniques added to make the poem more aesthetic. So it is necessary to understand how to read poetry. In this chapter, we will focus on understanding poetry.

Keywords

Poetic license, Poetic truth, Objective poetry, Subjective poetry

Discussion

Do you know which is the shortest poem in the world? Do you know who wrote it? The greatest heavyweight boxer of all time, Muhammad Ali wrote it. Before introducing the poem, let me tell you the background for it. Ali was giving a message on friendship in 1975, at Harvard. When he finished, the audience demanded a poem from him. And he uttered that poem which is still regarded as the world's shortest poem: "Me We". Just those two syllables were enough to convey what friendship means. It is a transition from the individual self "Me" to the power of unity, We. On the other hand, we have long verse narratives called epics. Both these forms come under the genre of poetry. So what exactly is poetry? What makes a poem, a poem? How do we understand a poem?

It is difficult to give a definition to poetry. For ages, writers have tried to define it. Let us see a few interesting definitions:

1. **Thomas Carlyle:** Poetry is a musical thought.

2. **William Wordsworth:** Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions recollected in tranquility.

3. **P.B. Shelley:** Poetry is the expression of imagination.

4. **Edgar Allan Poe:** Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty.

5. **Robert Frost:** Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.

6. **William Hazlitt:** Poetry is all that is worth remembering in life.

7. **Terry Eagleton:** A poem is a fictional, verbally inventive moral statement in which it is the author, rather than the printer or word processor, who decides where the lines should end.

8. **Kahlil Gibran:** Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.

1.1.1 Origin of Poetry

To identify the earliest form of poetry is a task, as the origin of poetry dates back to antiquity. Poetry existed in an oral form from prehistoric times itself. The ancient Sumerian poem *Epic of Gilgamesh* is cited as one of the earliest examples of poetry, dating back to 1800 BCE. The Indian Vedas, dating back to 1700-1100 BCE, and Indian Epics like *The Mahabharatha* and *The Ramayana* dating back to 400 – 100 BCE are the other earliest examples of poems. These texts were part of oral tradition and eventually, they were written down.

The word 'poetry' comes from the Greek word 'poietes' meaning 'creator'. Therefore a poet is a creator, who makes poems with his/her imaginative power and transports the readers to that imaginary world of poetry. Poetry can be lyrical, introspective, or recount narratives. It can be philosophical, emotional or sentimental. It is a way of connecting more deeply with oneself through the medium of language.

Poets enjoy 'poetic license' to create a desired effect. It is defined as the linguistic freedom the poets have to distort literal and historical truth in order to present a poetic truth, which often stems from their imagination. Let us look at certain common recognizable features of poetry that distinguish it from other genres of literature:

1. Language of Poetry

Poetry makes use of condensed language, that is, it makes use of fewer words to express a thought when compared to prose. In the language of poetry, every component, its order and pauses are important. Each word is purposefully patterned to create meaning. Although condensed, the language of poetry always means more than that of prose. It is open to interpretation.

2. Rich in Literary Devices

Poets use certain techniques to convey the implied meaning. It includes alliteration, assonance, simile, metaphor, image, symbol, rhythm, rhyme, personification, hyperbole, etc. For example, Wordsworth in one of his 'Lucy' poems describes Lucy as:

"A violet by a mossy stone
 Half hidden from the eye!
 Fair as a star, when only one
 Is shining in the sky" ("She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways")

This shows how the use of imagery can make a poem appealing to the senses. Simi-

larly, rhyme and meter enhance the aesthetic pleasure of it. It usually of musical quality. Rhyme, rhythm, and meter create a rhythmic beauty that will attract people. However, it is not necessary that a poem must be of musical quality. Sometimes it can be aggressively prosaic. For instance, read D.H Lawrence poem "To Women, As Far As I'm Concerned".

3. Tone and Mood of Poetry

Tone and mood are often used interchangeably. But both differ in terms of perspectives. Tone expresses the poet's attitude towards the subject matter, while mood is about the reader's emotional response to it or the overall feeling conveyed to the reader. For example, consider Wordsworth's poem "The Solitary Reaper". The tone of the poem is excitement but the mood is that of contemplation.

4. Structure of the Poem

Poetic structure discusses the form of poetry, number of lines it has, how they are arranged, the rhythm, rhyme scheme, and its metrical composition. Unlike other genres of writings, poetry can be written in certain shapes by organizing its word components. For example, George Herbert's "Easter Wings" when originally published, appeared horizontally on the page in the shape of two sets of wings. Now the poem appears vertically on page, so the stanzas appear like two hourglasses:

> Lord, who created man in wealth and store,
> Though foolishly he lost the same,
> Decaying more and more,
> Till he became
> Most poore:
> With thee
> O let me rise
> As larks, harmoniously,
> And sing this day thy victories:
> Then shall fall further the flight in me.

> My tender age in sorrow did beginne
> And still with sicknesses and shame.
> Thou didst so punish sinne,
> That I became
> Most thinne.
> With thee
> Let me combine,
> And feel thy victory:
> For, if I imp my wing on thine,
> Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

5. Poetic Truth

It is a literary device that takes liberty with facts/ truths to create an effect. How poetry deals with the treatment of truth is interesting to note. For example, a poet and a scientist may deal with nature, but their approaches are different. Wordsworth states that: "the sunshine is a glorious birth" ("Ode: Intimations of Immortality"), but a scientist will explore the scientific reason behind the sunrise. Science thus tries to deal with factual accuracy, while poetry looks beyond the surface level of truth. Science caters to denotative meaning, while poetry caters to connotative meaning and thus transcends reality.

1.1.2 Classification of Poetry

Poetry can be broadly classified into two – objective poetry and subjective poetry. Let us see the difference between the two:

Table 1.1.1 Classification of Poetry

Objective Poetry	Subjective Poetry
Impersonal and the poet presents an invented situation	Concerned with the poet's personal experiences and thoughts
Poet is a detached observer Objective poetry dates back to prehistoric time and was a part of oral tradition – people were interested in the physical world around them	Poet is not detached. He is the focus of attention Subjective poetry gained its prominence when people began to give importance to their inner thoughts and emotions
Includes ballad, epic, metrical romance, dramatic monologue, limerick	Includes lyric, ode, elegy, sonnet, epistle
Eg. Chevy Chase's "The Ballad"	Eg. Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"

This difference cannot be strictly observed all the time, as there is often an overlap of the two. For example, Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach" is an example of combining subjective and objective elements. However, this categorization is useful when we want to study different forms of poetry. We will learn about it in detail in the next unit.

1.1.3 How to Read a Poem?

Reading a poem is a creative act. Students often face difficulty in reading and understanding poetry. It is almost doing an injustice to the poem to analyse it in literal ways alone. Students often make false assumptions that they should understand an unfamiliar poem when they read it for the first time itself. The first thing we need to keep in mind while discussing this topic is that there is no such "one" way to approach a poem. Let us now see how to approach a poem:

1. Let the "words" speak for themselves: Read the poem several times to understand what the poem means. Pause when there is a punctuation and not at the end of each line break, that might break the flow of the poem. Wallace Stevens in his "Adagia" says "in poetry, you must love the words, the ideas … with all your capacity to love anything at all".

2. Listen to the "speaker" of the poem: a poem cannot always be the reflection of the poet's life. So the speaker/ narrator of the poem is more important than the poet's biography. Focusing on the speaker's part will help to understand the tone of the poem. Moreover, it helps to create a communication between the narrator and the reader.

3. Carefully analyse the figures of speech (imagery, metaphors, simile, etc), that drive the poem forward with thoughtful insights.

Let us take a poem and attempt to read it.

"The Solitary Reaper" by William Wordsworth

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;

Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travelers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

The poem is about a solitary reaper's song. In the first stanza, the poet talks about a lass (girl) reaping and singing all alone, immersed in herself. Let us analyse it deeper by looking into the punctuations used. The poet has used three exclamation marks in the first stanza to denote the excitement he has on listening to her voice. He invites us to listen to that voice which overflows the vale. It is a hyperbolic expression, telling us that the poet was entranced by her song.

In the second stanza, the poet compares the solitary reaper's song to a nightingale and a cuckoo (birds with sweetest voice). He says her voice is more thrilling and enchanting than that of the birds. It is symbolic that her voice is so melodious. It may also mean that the human voice is more soothing. This is a common device in poetry.

The third stanza tells about the poet's inability to understand the meaning of her song. This provides the speaker with a possibility to imagine what she might be singing. As he is not sure of the theme of her song, he puts forth his poetic fantasies that she might be singing about some past sorrows, unhappy things or some present natural sorrow, loss or pain. He is identifying a melancholic strain in her voice that may suit more with the poet's current state of mind.

In the final stanza, he says that although he is not sure of the theme of her song, her singing continues. He listened to it motionless and still. The poet tells us that "I had my fill" which suggests that he received what he wanted from her, even though he did not even know her name. He bears the music in his heart and continues his journey, in a sense, he is the 'solitary reaper'. He reaped what he wanted from her without her knowledge and walked out of her sight.

Now let's look into the literary devices used by Wordsworth to enhance the aesthetic pleasure of the readers:

1. **Rhyme scheme:** a total of four stanzas, each stanza following the rhyme scheme **ababccdd**
2. **Apostrophe:** The speaker addresses an absent person. This device helps him to communicate with the reader. As readers, we will feel a more emo-

tional connection with the poet.

3. **Imagery:** The poet presents a verbal picture, appealing to the reader's senses through the right choice of words. For example "the vale profound is overflowing with the sound", "More welcome notes to weary bands", "I saw her singing at her work/ And o'er the sickle bending". These lines help the reader to visualize what the poet has seen.

So, now, after closely reading the poem, we understand the message of the poem that the solitary reaper is offering us a lesson that we can overcome our sorrow by transforming it into art.

Recap

▶ Reading poetry is an act of reciprocity
▶ A passionate communication between the poet and the reader
▶ Poetry comes from the Greek word 'poietes'
▶ Poems make use of condensed language
▶ Use certain techniques to convey the implied meaning
▶ Tone and mood of a poem
▶ Poetic structure is the form of poetry
▶ Objective poetry is impersonal while subjective poetry is personal
▶ Poetry caters to connotative meaning and thus transcends reality
▶ Literary devices enhance the aesthetic pleasure of the readers

Objective Questions

1. How is poetry classified broadly?
2. What is the difference between 'tone' and 'mood'?
3. What do you mean by 'poetic license'?
4. From which Greek word is 'poetry' taken?
5. What is meant by imagery?
6. What are some of the literary devices used in poems?
7. What is 'apostrophe' in poetry?
8. What is objective poetry?
9. Which type of poetry does the 'lyric' come under?
10. What is poetic truth?

Answers

1. Subjective poetry and Objective poetry
2. Tone suggests the poet's attitude, while mood reflects the reader's emotional response
3. The linguistic freedom of the poets to violate the literal and historical truth in order to present a poetic truth
4. Poetry comes from the Greek word 'poietes'
5. A verbal picture
6. Alliteration, assonance, simile, metaphor, image, symbol, rhythm, rhyme, personification, and hyperbole
7. Addressing an absent person
8. Impersonal poetry about invented situations
9. Subjective poetry
10. Literary device that takes liberty with facts/truth to create an effect

Assignments

1. Write a critical appreciation of e.e. cumming's poem "l (a, A Leaf Falls with Loneliness"
2. Write a poem of your own and ask your peers to critically appreciate it.
3. Find out the differences between objective and subjective poetry.
4. What do you understand by the tone and mood of a poem.
5. What is meant by rhyme scheme in a poem?
6. Define imagery.
7. What is meant by apostrophe?
8. Comment on the structure of a poem.

Suggested Readings

1. Ashok, Padmaja. *A Companion to Literary Forms*. Orient Blackswan, 2015.
2. Eagleton, Terry. *How to Read a Poem*. Blackwell, 2007.
3. Wainwright, Jeffrey. *Poetry: The Basics*. Routledge, 2004.
4. Wolosky, Shira. *The Art of Poetry: How to Read a Poem*. Oxford UP, 2008.

Unit 2
Types of Poetry, Poetic Diction, Devices and Metre

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
- ▶ define some of the predominant types of poetry
- ▶ detail the main features of poetic types
- ▶ identify different types of poetic devices
- ▶ describe the significance of rhyme and metre in poetry

Prerequisites

According to the Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy, poetry is "emotion put into measure". In the first unit, we have discussed the general features of poetry. We have also seen a broad classification of poetry into Objective poetry and Subjective poetry. Objective poetry looks into the subject matter objectively, whereas subjective poetry gives importance to thoughts, feelings and emotions. Different from prose, poetry is often used to express specific feelings in a creative way. Poetry typically uses more decorative or expressive language, and analogies, while rhyme, and rhythm help to create a unique sound and feel. So, in this section, we plan to have a close look at the structural and technical aspects of poetry, such as its type, diction, literary devices and metre.

Keywords

Types of poetry, Poetic stanza, Poetic diction, Poetic devices, Metre

Discussion

Poetry is an interpretation of life through imagination and feeling (William Hudson). But how does poetry distinguish itself from other genres that also deal with the interpretation of life? The presence of metre, rhythm, rhyme, poetic devices, and most importantly, poetic diction helps to differentiate poetry from other genres.

Poetry is broadly divided into objective poetry and subjective poetry. For the sake of convenience, we can categorize poetry into different types. However, there is no strict separation between these forms as its features often overlap.

1.2.1 Types of Poetry

1.2.1.1 Objective Poetry

Ballad, Epic, Metrical Romance, Dramatic Monologue, Limerick

1.Ballad

The word 'ballad' is derived from the Latin word 'ballare', meaning 'to dance'. Originally, they were part of the oral tradition, narrating legends and stories among illiterate people. A Ballad can be defined as an orally transmitted song that tells a story. Therefore, it is hard to describe an authorship to ballads in the medieval times. Philip Sidney called ballads "the darling songs of the common people" because of their public appeal.

Features of a ballad:

▶ The theme of a ballad can be tragic or comic. Its subject matter includes love, war, adventure, bravery, etc.

▶ A ballad usually narrates a single incident, told in a conversational style, in ordinary language. For example the ballad "Sir Patrick Spens" is about a single episode of shipwreck.

▶ The poem is composed of four line stanzas in the form of rhymed (abcb or abab) quatrains with alternating four-stress (iambic tetrametre) and three-stressed (trimetre) lines. Let us take our earlier example. The first four lines of "Sir Patrick Spens":

The King sits in Dunfer line toun,
Drinking the blude -reid wine
'O whaur will I get guid sailor
Tae sail this new ship of mine?'

The poem rhymes **abcb**.

Ballads make use of stock epithets and refrains. A stock epithet is a phrase or an adjective used to describe a special trait of things or people. For example, in "Sir Patrick Spens", "blood-red wine", "my mirry men". Refrains are lines or words that are repeated at intervals in a poem for emphasis. For example in John Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci: A Ballad", his first two stanzas use the refrain "O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms"

Table 1.2.1 Types of Ballads

Popular Ballad	Broadside Ballad	Literary Ballad	Mock Ballad
Also known as folk ballad or traditional ballad	Printed on one side of a single sheet (called broadside) of poor quality paper	Also known as lyrical ballad	Contains all the features of a literary ballad, but in a humorous way
Belongs to the oral tradition (never written)	Dealt with a current event or person and was sung to a well-known tune	Narrative poems written in deliberate imitation of the form, language and spirit of the traditional ballad	A comic theme is treated with the seriousness appropriate to ballad
Exists in many forms as each singer who learnt the ballad improvised it	Sentimental in subject matter (stories of murder, adventure, etc.)	Great influence of traditional ballads	

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| Eg. Francis J. Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* – contains 305 ballads ('Sir Patrick Spens', 'The Ballad of Chevy Chase', 'The Twa Corbies', 'Clerk Saunders', etc. , Robin Hood Ballads | Public events were also published in broadsides and the advent of newspapers put an end to the broadsides. | Eg. *Lyrical Ballads* (1798– Wordsworth and Coleridge), Keats' 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' | Eg. William Maginn's 'The Rime of the Ancient Waggoner' and William Cowper's 'The Diverting History of John Gilpin' |

2. Epic

An epic or a heroic poem is a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a grand and elevated style. Following are the criteria that an epic poem usually possesses:

- A long verse narrative on heroic deeds, told in a formal style. For example, Homer's epics have 24 books. *Paradise Lost* consists of 12 books. *The Mahabharata* is ten times the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

- Centered on a divine or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depend the destiny of a tribe or nation or the human race.

In terms of importance, Aristotle ranked the epic second to tragedy, while many Renaissance critics considered the epic the highest of all genres. Epics can be classified as "Traditional epics" and "Literary epics".

Table 1.2.2 Classification of Epics

Traditional Epics	Literary Epics
Also called as Primary epics or folk epics	Also called as Secondary epics
Written versions of oral poems combining myths, legends, folk tales and history, thus forming a part of the nation's cultural history.	Written by individual poets in deliberate imitation of the traditional form.
Eg. Homer's Greek epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (composed in circa 8th century BCE) , Valmiki's *The Ramayana* (composed in circa 5th century BCE), Vyasa's *The Mahabharata* (4th century BCE), Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (circa 8th century CE)	Eg. Virgil's *Aeneid* (1st century BCE) served as chief model for Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), which was in turn a model for Keats' fragmentary epic *Hyperion* (1820)

Features of an Epic

- Magnificent scale of action, time of action and settings: In *Paradise Lost*, the action involves the revolt of rebel angels against God, the journey of Satan to the newly discovered world, his attempt to outwit God by deceiving mankind and finally his success is subverted by the sacrificial action of

Christ which covers the period before the creation of the universe to the end of the world. Also Milton uses the entire universe and the cosmic spaces as its setting.

► The hero will be a quasi-divine figure whose actions will leave an impact on a large group of people. In *Iliad*, the greatest Greek warrior Achilles is the son of the sea-nymph Thetis. In *Paradise Lost*, Christ is both a God and a man.

► Epics make use of machinery, i.e., supernatural agents. Homer's epics have Olympian Gods, *Paradise Lost* has archangels, Christ, and Satan.

► **Grand style** of epic poetry: An epic uses a dignified and elevated language that suits the grandeur of the theme. For instance, Milton uses Latinate diction and complex syntax to narrate the story of the fall of man. The **grand style** of poetry includes the usage of classical allusions and epic simile. Epic similes, also called **Homeric similes,** first used by Homer, are long and formal similes in which the poet makes an elaborate comparison, to enhance the ceremonial quality of narration that runs into many lines. For example, in the *Odyssey*, Penelope expresses her feeling of helplessness by comparing the suitors to hunters and herself to a trapped lion:

"Her mind in torment, wheeling like some lion at bay, dreading the gangs of hunters closing their cunning ring around him for the finish."

► **Epic conventions**: Literary epics are highly conventional compositions, as they are imitations of Homer's epics. These conventions are prominent while ordering episodes. They include:

● The narrator begins with a **proposition** or an argument that defines the purpose, followed by an **invocation** to the muse for inspiration and then addresses an **epic question** to the muse, the answer to which inaugurates the narrative proper. For example, in Virgil's *Aeneid* (Book 1), he opens his poem by declaring its epic theme, "warfare and a man at war," and invokes his muse and asks her to explain the anger of Juno, queen of the gods:

Arms and the man I sing, who, forced by fate
And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate,
Expelled and exiled, left the Trojan shore.
Long labors, both by sea and land, he bore;
And in the doubtful war, before he won
The Latin realm and built the destined town,
His banished gods restored to rights divine,
And settled sure succession in his line;
From whence the race of Alban fathers come,
And the long glories of majestic Rome.
O Muse! the causes and the crimes relate,—
What goddess was provok'd, and whence her hate;
For what offense the Queen of Heav'n began
To persecute so brave, so just a man;
Involved his anxious life in endless cares,
Exposed to wants, and hurried into wars!
Can heav'nly minds such high resentment show,
Or exercise their spite in human woe?

These lines illustrate proposition, invocation and the epic question.

● The narrative begins at a critical point in action, i.e., "in the middle of things" (*in media res* – Latin expression). So

flashbacks and non-linear narratives are common devices used in epics to fill in the gaps of the story. Virgil's *Aeneid* begins at a crucial moment: when the Trojans are stranded on the shores of an enemy territory, after many years of wandering. It is only in Book II, the chronological beginning of *Aeneid*, i.e., Troy's invasion by the Greeks is given.

- Another significant epic convention is the cataloging of principal characters. For example, Milton's formal detailing of the procession of fallen angels in Book I of *Paradise Lost*.

- In epics, contests and games are used to advance the plot. In Virgil's *Aeneid*, Aeneas organizes funeral games for his father's death anniversary—a boat race, a foot race, a boxing match, and an archery contest. Another notable example is the game of dice in *The Mahabharata*.

3. Mock Epic

A Mock epic or mock-heroic poem is a form of poetic composition where an insignificant, trivial theme is treated and presented with all the serious dignity of an epic. It has all the sublime features of an epic – proposition, invocation to muses, intervention of supernatural agents, inversions, high sounding language. But the intention is mostly satirical, aimed at reforming. An ancient example of a mock-epic is a parody of the *Iliad*, *the Battle of the Frogs and Mice* (circa 7th century BCE). Another great example for a mock-epic is Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), a satire on the fashionable society of the upper-class. It narrates a trivial incident – cutting off a lock of hair from Belinda's head by the Baron. It has all the features and conventions of an epic:

The poem begins with the invocation and the theme (proposition) is also suggested in the invocation.

"Say, what strange motive, Goddess! could compel
A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?"

It uses epic similes: Comparing Belinda's dressing to the arming of an epic warrior like Achilles.

"Now awful beauty puts on all its arms;
The fair each moment rises in her charms,
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightning quickens in her eyes."

It also employs supernatural machinery – sylphs and gnomes to control the affairs of human beings.

(a) Metrical Romance

Metrical romance is a romance written in verse, which resembles the epic. It includes verse stories told in the Romance languages (Spanish, French, Italian, Romanian, Catalan). Romance originally meant a work written in the French language, which evolved from the dialect of a Roman language, Latin. Major themes are chivalry, adventure, love, etc. It makes use of supernatural events to add the mysterious effect of enchantments. This was popular during the Medieval times.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (14th century), Chaucer's *'The Knight's Tale'*, Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* are a few examples of metrical romances.

4. Dramatic Monologue

A dramatic monologue is a lyrical poem in which the speaker (not the poet) narrates his experiences and inner feelings in a conversational style. It is an objective poetic analysis of a subjective point of view (Padmaja Ashok). Robert Browning perfected this type of poetry.

Dramatic monologue reveals the speaker's character through his long speech known as monologue. However, it differs from the soliloquy in the aspect that a soliloquy is not meant to be heard by other characters. But in a dramatic monologue, there is the presence of a listener. M.H Abrams remarks that the dramatic monologue has the following characteristics:

- A single person, who is not the poet himself, utters the entire poem in a specific situation at a critical moment. In Browning's poem "Andrea del Sarto", the speaker is the historical Renaissance painter Andrea del Sarto.

- The speaker addresses and interacts with one or more other people; but we know the presence of the listener and what he says and does, only from clues in the discourse of a single speaker. The listeners do not interrupt the narrator's speech but their reactions are conveyed naturally in the course of the single man's talk. Let us take our erstwhile example of Browning's poem. The presence of Lucrezia as the listener in the poem can be felt at the opening of the poem:

But do not let us quarrel any more
No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me for once :
"Sit down and all shall happen as you wish
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?

From the lines like "You turn your face", "Nay, Love, you did give all I asked","Do you already forget words like those?", "And you smile indeed!", we can visualise how Lucrezia is reacting to Andrea's monologue.

- The monologue is so organised that its focus is on the temperament and the character that the dramatic speaker unintentionally reveals in the course

of what he says. Here, Andrea reveals himself as a faultless painter (well-informed in techniques) but lacks soul in his paintings. From his monologue, readers will understand why he cannot excel like Raphael or Michelangelo.

- The readers will understand about the setting and background from the speaker. From the words of Andrea, the reader can see that the scene is in Andrea's studio in Fiesole:

As if-Forgive now – should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole

5. *Limerick*

The name is derived from a popular song's refrain "Will you come up to Limerick?", Limerick is a country in Ireland. In the genre of poetry, limerick is an oral form of light verse. Light verse poems treat subject matters in a gaily tone and use ordinary language. A limerick is a short poem, that is, it consists of a single five-line stanza in anapestic metre (two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable), rhyming aabba. The third and fourth lines are shortened from three feet to two feet.

The oldest existing limerick is a prayer by Thomas Aquinas (13th century in Latin). The form was popularized by the English poet Edward Lear in his collection *A Book of Nonsense*. One such example from Edward Lear is given below:

There was a Young Lady whose chin
 Resembled the point of a pin;
So she had it made sharp,
And purchased a harp,
And played several tunes with her chin.

1.2.1.2 Subjective Poetry

Lyric, Ode, Elegy, Idyll, Sonnet, Haiku

1. Lyric

The word 'lyric' is derived from the word lyre, a musical instrument. Originally, the lyric was a song sung to the accompaniment of a lyre or a harp. A lyric is a short non-narrative poem that expresses an intense state of mind or perception, thought and feeling of the speaker. The musical quality and rhythm of a lyric make it appealing to the listeners/ readers.

The lyrics contain three parts. In the first part, the poet talks about the subject matter or states how he is feeling. In the second part, he develops his thoughts, and the expression of his emotion reaches a maximum. In the final part, the poet accepts everything with a philosophical mind and finds solace. The poem can have either a happy ending or a pensive ending. For example, in P. B. Shelley's poem "Ode to the West Wind" (1820), the poet begins by stating his feeling of helplessness in the mighty hands of nature. In the later lines, which is the main part of the poem, the poet develops his thoughts. And in the final section, he seems to identify himself and realizes the truth. He ends the poem with a highly philosophical question. "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

Features of a Lyric

▶ The lyric is written in the first person 'I', not necessarily the poet and expresses personal emotions (highly subjective)

▶ Spontaneous in composition and musical in nature

▶ Cohesively structured and towards the end of the poem, the growth of the speaker's mind is obviously clear

Important types of lyric poetry are ode, sonnet, elegy, occasional poetry, and hymn.

2. Ode

The word 'ode' is derived from a Greek word 'aeidein', which means to chant or sing. Ode denotes a long lyric poem that is serious and reflective in subject matter. It is addressed to someone or something and has a formal stanzaic structure. The Greek poet Pindar was the first to write odes. Later, the Roman poet Horace started writing odes with certain modifications from Pindar's odes. The English critic and poet Edmund Gosse defines the ode as, "a strain of enthusiastic and exalted lyric, verse, directed to a fixed purpose, and dealing progressively with one dignified theme."

The Greek ode had two forms, the Dorian ode and the Lesbian ode. The English odes, deviate in form and metre from the traditional Greek ode, also have two forms – the Irregular ode and Regular ode.

Let us look at a few features of an ode:

Fig 1.2.1 Features of an Ode

Celebrates the poet's deep reflections on any subject

Directly addressed to a person or a thing

Clarity in development of thought

Elevated style and formal tone
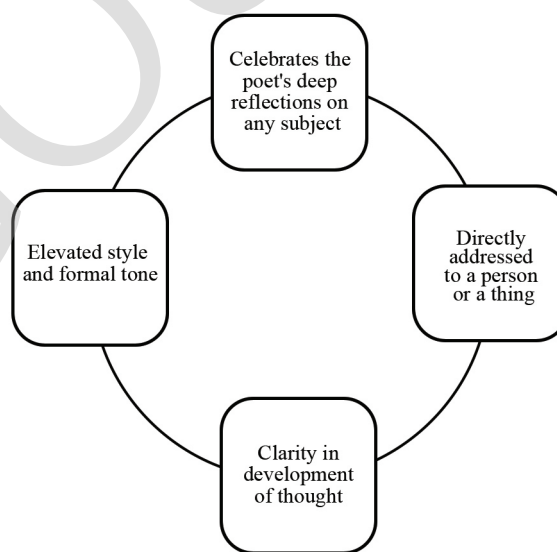
(a) Dorian Ode:

The Dorians were one of the three tribes of ancient Greece who had their own dialect and culture, and Dorian ode is named after it. It was choric in nature and sung to the accompaniment of dance. So it is also called Choral ode. The structure of the Dorian ode differentiates itself from other odes. Its structure is based on the movement of the dancers:

I Stanza: STROPH

> The word meaning is 'to turn'. In reciting the strophe, the dancers move from the right of the stage to the left.

II Stanza: ANTISTROPHE

> The word meaning is "to turn back," which means that the dancers move in the opposite direction of the strophe, that is, the movement is from left to right. It serves as a response to the strophe.

III Stanza: EPODE

> The word meaning is "after song". During the recital of epode, the dancers stood still. The strophe and antistrophe are written in exactly the same structure, but the epode changes in structure.

This triad can be repeated any number of times in the ode. The ancient Greek poet Pindar popularized this kind of ode, hence this is also known as **Pindaric Ode**. Pindar's odes were encomiastic, that is, they were written to praise or glorify someone.

Eg. Thomas Gray's "The Bard" (1757) and "The Progress of Poesy" (1759). The triad is repeated thrice in these odes

(b) Lesbian Ode

It is named after the island of Lesbos, where it originated. The Latin poet Horace wrote odes in this form and hence it is also called **Horatian ode**. In contrast to the formal Pindaric odes, Horatian odes are calmer, meditative and colloquial in nature. It was popularized by another Roman writer Catullus.

Horatian ode consists of short stanzas of the same length , written in homostrophic form, that is written in single, repeated stanza form. For example, Andrew Marvell's "Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland", is written in short four-lined stanzas of similar rhyme and metre.

(c) English Ode

English odes have two types, the Regular ode and the Irregular ode. The regular odes are those long lyric poems of same-length stanzas. Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" is an example of regular ode. **Irregular odes** have varying lengths of strophe. This form was introduced by Abraham Cowley, so it is sometimes called **Cowleyan ode**. Each stanza had its own length and rhyme scheme. The Romantic poets have popularized this kind of ode. For example, Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality".

3. Elegy

Originated in Greece, the term elegy is derived from the Greek word 'elegeia,' which means to lament. An elegy was defined as any poem which was written in elegiac metre (alternating dactylic hexametres and pentametres in couplets known as elegiac distichs). Its mood or content was not relevant then. Elegy in its ancient form dealt with love, war, politics, mourning for the dead or any subject matter. From the 17th century, the usage of the term got limited to a formal and sustained verse of lament for the death of a beloved one, that usually ends in consolation. The English elegy does not use the ancient elegiac metre.

Elegy can be broadly classified as personal elegy and impersonal elegy. In a personal elegy the poet mourns for the death of some close friend or relative. Tennyson's "In Memoriam" (1850) is an elegy on the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam. In an impersonal

elegy, the poet grieves over human destiny or over some aspect of society and life. For example, Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751) talks about memento mori and human mortality.

Features of an Elegy

- Reflective poem about the loss of someone or something
- Serious and dignified tone
- Some poets use 'elegy' as a vehicle to digress and express their perspectives on other subjects. In Milton's "Lycidas", he talks about the degradation of poetry and religion.
- There are certain common conventions in an elegy:

    - Begins with lamentation, where the poet mourns
    - Praise and admiration for the dead
    - Ends on a final note of consolation and death
    - Use of repetitions, refrains and repeated questions
    - A procession of mourners
    - The poet's reflection on the unkindness of death, resentment against cruel fate

Pastoral Elegy

In Latin, the word 'pastor' means 'shepherd'. Pastoral elegy is an important subtype of elegy in which the poet represents himself as a shepherd mourning the death of a fellow shepherd. The Sicilian Greek poet Theocritus was the well-known practitioner of this form. "His Idylls", "Epigrams", "Lament of Daphnis" are best examples. In ancient Rome, the Latin poet Virgil wrote his "Eclogues" and "Georgics" in this form. Later the English writers took up this form and made it popular.

The first English pastoral elegy is Edmund Spenser's *The Shepherd Calendar* (1579). He wrote "Astrophel" (1595) to mourn the death of Sir Philip Sidney. Milton's "Lycidas" (1638), Shelley's "Adonais" (1821), Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis" (1865) are the most notable examples of pastoral elegy.

Features of a pastoral elegy

- The speaker begins with an invocation to the muse and there are frequent references to various mythological characters.
- Nature joins the speaker to mourn for the dead.
- The mourner questions the nymphs for their negligence and criticizes them for the death.
- There is a procession of appropriate mourners.
- Digressions are significant for the development of thought.
- Detailed description on the flowers that are used to deck the hearse.
- The elegy concludes with a consolation.

4. Idyll

The word 'Idyll' is derived from the Greek word meaning "a little picture". It is not exactly a poetic genre, but a short poem or an episode in a larger poem that describes rural life. It has the characteristics of both lyric and narrative. It gives an idealised image of pastoral life or country life. It has no fixed form.

Early examples of idylls include the pastorals of Theocritus and Virgil. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Village Blacksmith" (1840), Alfred Tennyson's "English Idylls and Other Poems" (1874), Browning's "Dramatic Idylls" (1879) are other notable examples.

A few lines from "The Village Blacksmith" is given below for your better understanding:

> And children coming home from school
> Look in at the open door;
> They love to see the flaming forge,
> And hear the bellows roar,
> And catch the burning sparks that fly
> Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

5. Sonnet

Originated in Italy in the 14th century, the sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines written in iambic pentametre and arranged in a specific rhyme scheme. The word 'sonnet' is derived from the Italian word *sonetto* which means 'a little sound'. It was established by the Italian master Petrarch as a major form of love poetry, and came to be adopted in Spain, France, and England in the 16th century, and in Germany in the 17th.

A sonnet is defined by its form and not by the theme. The early standard was that of a courtly love convention. Petrarch's sonnets were expressions of his love for an idealized lady, Laura. The Elizabethan sonnets also dealt with Love. But in the 17th century John Donne extended the sonnet's scope to religion, and Milton extended it to politics. It was largely neglected in the 18th century. The sonnet was revived in the 19th century by Wordsworth, Keats, and Baudelaire, and sonnets were written on various themes.

(a) Sonnet Cycle: Also called as a sonnet sequence, it refers to a collection of sonnets that are thematically linked and show a progression in thought. The Italian master Petrarch's mid 14th century sonnet cycle was called *Il Canzoniere*. Sir Philip Sidney's "Astrophel and Stella" was the first major English sonnet cycle.

The two major patterns in sonnets are the Petrarchan sonnet and the Shakespearean sonnet.

(b) Petrarchan Sonnet

Also called as Italian sonnet, it has two parts – the octave and the sestet. The first eight lines are called **Octave** (rhyming abbaabba), which presents an argument, or observation or a question. The last six lines are called **sestet** (rhyming cdecde or cdccdc) which provides a counter-argument or an answer to the question posed in the octave. That is, the transition from octave to sestet coincides with a 'turn' (Italian, volta) in the argument or mood of the poem. The pause between octave and sestet is called **'caesura'**. Milton's poem "On His Blindness" is an example of Petrarchan sonnet.

(c) Shakespearean Sonnet

Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey developed the English sonnet, after experimenting with the Italian form. Shakespeare was its greatest practitioner. This sonnet falls into three quatrains (four lines) and a concluding couplet rhyming abab cdcd efef gg. The couplet presents a conclusion, amplification, or even refutation of the previous three stanzas. Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 is an example for this form of sonnet.

(d) Spenserian Sonnet

Edmund Spenser in his famous sonnet sequence "Amoretti" (1595) deviated from the common pattern of English sonnet. It has three quatrains and a rhyming couplet like the English sonnet, but the quatrains are inter-linked with a connecting rhyme: abab bcbc cdcd ee.

11. Haiku

Emerged in Japanese literature during the 17th century, haiku is a poetic composition that expresses the poet's emotional or spiritual response to a natural object, scene or season of the year. Haiku consists of unrhymed lines of 17 syllables, arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively. This emerged as

a terse reaction to elaborate poetic traditions. But it was difficult for the English writers to strictly follow this form, so most poets who wrote haiku loosened the rule for the number and pattern of the syllables. The imagist poets were greatly influenced by the haiku for its brevity. Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" is a good example of the haiku in the loosened English form:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

1.2.2 Poetic Diction

The term 'diction' generally covers the language of a work of literature, that ranges from vocabulary to the style of the work. Poetic diction is the language of poetry, particularly. The words are arranged in such a way that it arouses an aesthetic imagination in the reader. However, 18th century writers like Thomas Gray opined that 'the language of the age is never the language of poetry'. For instance, poets like Spenser in the Elizabethan age, or Hopkins in the Victorian age deliberately made use of a diction that is different from the common parlance or other genres, but also deviated from the writing style of other poets of their era.

For the neoclassical writers, the basics of poetic diction adhered to a principle of decorum – 'that is, a poet must adapt the level and type of his diction to the mode and status of a particular genre'. Higher genres like tragedy, epic, and ode use a refined and elevated style of language while pastoral poetry uses a poetic diction that is simple and understandable to common people. Neoclassical writers preferred poetic diction of certain characteristics like archaism, recurrent use of epithets, invocations, personifications, periphrasis or circumlocution (roundabout way of describing something) and substituted common terms with decorous words.

However, William Wordsworth in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" attacked this neoclassical poetic diction as 'artificial', 'unnatural' and 'vicious'. He claimed that the criterion for a poetic language must be the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' and the right model for the natural expression of feeling is the actual speech of "humble and rustic life".

1.2.3 Poetic Devices

Poetic devices are certain techniques or tools employed by the poets to emphasize the meaning and to create a special effect. It helps to create rhythm, tone, mood and feeling in a poem. Let us look at a few common poetic devices:

1.2.3.1 Poetic devices that make use of sounds

1. **Alliteration**: The repetition of the same sounds in a sequence of nearby words. Usually the term is applied to initial consonants of words or of stressed syllables for specialized effects, to emphasize the meaning and to connect related words. Read Emily Dickinson's poem "I Felt a Funeral in my Brain" for examples of alliteration:

   /f/ in "I felt a funeral",
   /s/ in "seated/ A service",
   /b/ in Bell/ And Being",
   /s/ and /r/ in ".. Silence, some strange Race,/ Wrecked solitary"

2. **Assonance**: The repetition of similar vowel sounds in the stressed syllables of the neighbouring words. The following lines from Wordsworth's "Daffodils" repeat the vowel sound /i:/

   Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
   Fluttering and dancing in the breeze…

3. **Consonance**: Repetition of a sequence of

two or more consonants, but with a change in the intervening vowel. Eg: "struts and frets"; "tale told" in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

4. **Onomatopoeia:** Derived from the Greek word "onomatopoeia," which means "the making of a name or word," onomatopoeia is sometimes called echoism. It implies a word or group of words that imitates the sound it denotes. For example, 'tick-tock' of a clock, 'hiss', 'buzz', 'rattle', 'bang'. In Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven", the repetition of the words tapping and rapping mimics the sound of knocking at the door:

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door

5. **Rhyme :** Rhyme is the repetition of the same sound usually at the end of verse lines. The last stressed vowel and of all the speech sounds following it are usually repeated. Rhyme creates a musicality that appeals to the readers. For example, make-break, day-way, late-fate, etc.

The common rhyme scheme, that is when the rhyming words occur at the end of a verse line, is called **end rhyme**. On the other hand, **Internal rhyme**, also called middle rhyme, is rhyme that occurs in the middle of lines of poetry, instead of at the end of lines.

Let us consider the poem "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more."

End rhymes are the rhyming words at the end of each line. In each stanza in "The Raven," the end rhymes of the first line and third lines alternate, while the second line, fourth line, fifth line and sixth lines are always the same. For example, the rhyme scheme in the first stanza is abcbbb. In each stanza of "The Raven", the first and third lines have internal rhymes, that is the rhyme occurs within the line instead of end rhyme. See, in line 1 "dreary" rhymes with "weary," and in line 3 "napping" rhymes with "tapping" and "rapping" as well.

When the rhyme consists of a single stressed syllable, it is called a **masculine rhyme**. When the rhyme consists of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, with the latter bearing the rhyming sound is called a **feminine rhyme**. Let us consider the poem "The Solitary Reaper":

1. Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang   a
2. As if her song could have no ending;   b
3. I saw her singing at her work,   c
4. And o'er the sickle bending;—   b
5. I listened, motionless and still;   d
6. And, as I mounted up the hill,   d
7. The music in my heart I bore,   e
8. Long after it was heard no more.   E

Still-hill, bore-more are examples of masculine rhyme and ending-bending is an example for feminine rhyme.

6. **Rhythm:** According to Ezra Pound, rhythm is a form cut into time (*ABC of Reading*).

The term 'rhythm' is derived from a Greek word meaning 'flow'. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines rhythm as the pattern of sounds perceived as the recurrence of equivalent 'beats' at more or less equal intervals, that is, it is the pattern of stressed and unstressed beats. Thus, the stress governs the rhythm. It is analysed by determining the number of lines, the number of syllables and the arrangement of syllables in a line. It helps to create a flow while reading a poem.

1.2.3.2 Poetic devices that make use of the meaning of words

1. **Allegory**: The word 'allegory' is derived from the Greek word *allegoria* which means 'speaking otherwise'. It is a narrative strategy, in verse or prose, whose surface story has a connotative significance. The characters and the events of the story may represent or allegorize either historical personages or events (in a historical/ political allegory) or an abstract concept (in allegory of ideas). For example, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a political allegory, whereas John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory of ideas, where certain abstract entities (virtues, vices, modes of life, characters of people) are personified.

2. **Allusion**: A passing reference to another literary work or person or event is called an allusion. It is not explicitly identifiable, but the knowledge shared by the author is deciphered by the audience themselves. Thus allusions help an author to enrich their work with profound meanings. The title of Cleanth Brooks' collection of essays *The Well-wrought Urn* is an allusion to the fourth stanza of John Donne's poem "The Canonization".

3. **Apostrophe**: A figure of speech used by the poet to address directly an absent person or an abstract idea or a non-human entity. It serves as an outlet for the character to express his inner thoughts and feelings. Most of the odes use this tool to address an absent person or entity. In William Blake's poem "The Lamb", the poet begins the poem by apostrophising the imagined lamb:

> Little Lamb who made thee
> Dost thou know who made thee
> Gave thee life and bid thee feed.

4. **Cliché**: An expression or word that is overused is called a cliché. It relies on overly familiar language which can be either figurative or literal. "To err is human, to forgive divine", "A little learning is a dangerous thing" (from Alexander Pope's "An Essay on Criticism") are expressions that sound cliché now.

5. **Euphemism**: An inoffensive or indirect expression used in place of a harsh and offensive one is called euphemism. The most common example is to say "passed away" instead of "died".

6. **Hyperbole**: A kind of trope which states an exaggeration of possibility. Its meaning should not be taken in a literal sense as it is an overstatement. It is often used either for serious or ironic or comic effect. The Metaphysical poet John Donne is a master in employing the technique of hyperbole. For instance, consider his poem "The Canonization":
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill

Add one more to the plaguy bill?

Donne uses these hyperboles to mock the Petrarchan paraphernalia of love.

7. **Irony**: A rhetorical device that refers to the incongruity between what is said and what actually is the reality. It is the contrast between the surface meaning and the underlying meaning of what is said. The word "irony" comes from the Greek word *eiron*, a stock character in ancient Greek comedy who pretends stupidity in order to deceive and defeat the alazon, a braggart. Both characters are dissemblers who pretend to be something other than what they are. This is the root of irony. Irony can be divided into verbal irony, dramatic irony and situational irony.

(a) *Verbal Irony*: It is a kind of sarcasm, in which there occurs a discrepancy between what is said and what is actually meant. This technique is intentionally used by the speaker to criticize or blame someone or something. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Antony calls Brutus an "honourable man" in his speech:

He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.

Here Antony is mocking the idea of Brutus having honour, reminding people of what Caesar had done for them and how that was considered to be the cause for assassination by Brutus and others.

(b) *Dramatic Irony*: A situation in which the character is ignorant of what is happening, whereas the audience knows the truth. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, King Duncan says that he trusts Macbeth ("he was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust"), but the audience knows that Macbeth is plotting to kill Duncan.

(c) *Situational Irony:* Literary technique in which the opposite of what is expected happens. This outcome can be either humorous or tragic. In O. Henry's short story "The Gift of the Magi", the wife cuts her long hair and sells it to have the money to buy her husband a pocket watch chain. He sells his watch to buy her a hair accessory, leaving both with a useless gift, which was not what they expected for their efforts.

8. **Simile**: A figure of speech in which two distinctive things, actions or feelings are compared using the words 'as' or 'like'. For example, Wordsworth's comparison of his wandering to a cloud: "I wandered lonely as a cloud/ That floats on high o'er vales and hills'. Another oft-used example is Robert Burns "O my love's like a red red rose".

9. **Metaphor**: This figure of speech also compares two distinctive things, actions or feelings, but without asserting that comparison using the connectives 'as' or 'like'. Rather than the objects, their characteristics or qualities are compared here. For example, consider the poem "Hope is the Thing with Feathers":

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.

Here Hope is compared to a bird. If it was written "Hope is 'like' a thing with feathers", then it becomes a simile. Here hope is compared to the quality of a bird without any connectives. Thus it becomes a metaphor.
I.A. Richards has introduced two terms –

Tenor and **Vehicle**, to suggest the subject and the metaphorical term respectively. Here, Hope is the tenor and the 'bird' is the vehicle.

(a) An **implicit metaphor** is usually defined as any sentence that contains the metaphorical term (vehicle), but not a specified subject(tenor). The subject is implied from the context. For example, in Maya Angelou's poem "Caged Bird", the poet gives metaphors of two birds. The free bird is a metaphor for white Americans, while the caged bird represents African Americans and other black and brown people. But the subject is nowhere mentioned in the poem.

(b) A **mixed metaphor** contains two or more metaphors that seem unacceptable and do not logically fit with each other. When writers use mixed metaphors unintentionally or for a specific artistic effect, it is called **catachresis**. A famous example for mixed metaphor is Shakespeare's soliloquy in *Hamlet*:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing them.

(c) Two incongruous metaphors 'arms' and 'sea' are used here to suggest Hamlet's confusion. A **dead metaphor** is a metaphor that has been used for so long and has become so popular that we no longer care about the literal difference between the subject and the metaphorical term. Phrases like 'raining cats and dogs' (to suggest raining heavily), 'body of an essay' are examples of dead metaphors.

10. Metonymy: The term 'metonymy' in Greek means "a change of name". It is a figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else closely associated with it. For example, "the crown" and "the sceptre" are used to refer to the king.

11.Oxymoron: A rhetorical figure that conjoins two contradictory or opposing ideas. 'Pianoforte', the original name of the instrument piano, is an example of oxymoron, in that 'piano' means quiet and 'forte' means loud. Other examples are 'happy grief', 'darkness visible', 'pleasing pain' Oscar Wilde's statement "I can resist anything, except temptation" is another example of oxymoron.

12. Paradox: A statement that seems logically absurd or contradictory, but can be interpreted in a way that makes sense. Wordsworth's famous poem "My Heart Leaps Up" contains a line "The child is father of the man", George Orwell's statement from *Animal Farm* "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" are notable examples.

13. Personification: A figure of speech in which human qualities are attributed to an inanimate or an abstract thing. It is also a type of metaphor and helps the reader to create an emotional connection with the object. See how Death is personified in Emily Dickinson's poem"Because I could not Stop for Death":

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

14. Synecdoche: The term 'synecdoche'

in Greek means "taking together". It is a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to signify the whole or the whole is used to denote a part. One common form of synecdoche uses a body part (hand, heart, head, eyes, etc.) to represent an entire person. For example, when we say "we need to hire more hands' ', it suggests that we need to hire more laborers. For a better understanding, let us look at the following lines from Dickinson's poem "I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died":

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room –

Here, eyes refer to people around. Sometimes people confuse synecdoche with metonymy. The difference is that in synecdoche, a part of the whole thing is used to represent the whole, whereas in metonymy, a closely associated word is substituted to represent it.

1.2.3.3 Poetic devices that make use of the images

1. **Imagery:** Cecil Day Lewis, a poet of the 1930s, defined an image as "a picture made out of words" and the poem may itself be "an image composed from a multiplicity of things". Therefore, imagery is a descriptive language that creates a mental picture evoking sensory experiences as well as emotional responses in the reader. It involves visual, auditory, tactile (touch), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste) and kinesthetic (movement) qualities. In a wider sense, the term 'imagery' is also used to denote figurative languages of metaphors and similes.
For example, Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils"

is a good example for visual imagery:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

2. **Synesthesia**: The term is derived from Greek roots, 'syn' meaning 'union' and 'aesthesis', meaning 'sensation'. Therefore the literal meaning of the word is a union of senses or to feel together. In poetry, it stands for a fusion of senses. The term was popularized by French symbolists Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine. This description of one mode of sensation in terms of another, is also called 'sense transference.'

In Emily Dickinson's poem "I heard a Fly Buzz- When I died", she connects visual and auditory senses.

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

1.2.4 Metre

In simple terms, metre is the rhythmic arrangement of stresses in a line of verse. The metre is determined by the pattern of stronger and weaker stresses in a syllable (stressed syllable and unstressed syllable respectively) of the words in a line. The art of identifying the metre of a poem is called scansion. Scansion identifies the rhythm of poetry by dividing the lines into feet (unit of metre), marking the stressed and unstressed syllables and then counting the syllables.

1.2.4.1 Metrical foot

A **metrical foot** is a combination of strong stress and an associated weak stress. Therefore, metre can also be defined as the number of feet in a line of verse. There are five standard feet in English. Let us look at each of them with an example:

Foot	Stress pattern	Example
iamb	unstressed-stressed	The cur | few tolls | the knell | of par | ting day.|
anapest	unstressed-un-stressed-stressed	The Assyr|ian came down| like the wolf|on the fold|
trochee	stressed – unstressed	Tyger,|Tyger,|burning bright|
dactyl	stressed-unstressed-un-stressed	Half a league,| half a league|
spondee	stressed – stressed	Break, break, | break

Metre is named after the number of feet in a line:

monometer	one foot	pentameter	five feet
dimeter	two feet	hexameter	six feet
trimeter	three feet	heptameter	seven feet
tetrameter	four feet	octameter	eight feet

Consider the first line from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard":

The cur \| few tolls \| the knell \| of par \| ting day.\|

Since it has five feet and each of the feet is an iamb, the line is said to be written in iambic pentameter.

An alexandrine is a verse line written in iambic hexameter.

1.2.4.2 Types of Verses:

1. **Blank Verse**: The verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter is called blank verse. Introduced by the Earl of Surrey, this metrical form resembles the natural rhythm of ordinary speech. It is used more often in versification than other forms, due to its flexible nature. Milton's *Paradise Lost* was written in blank verse. Wordsworth used it in his autobiographical work "The Prelude".

2. **Free Verse**: Known by the name *vers libre* in French, free verse lacks a regular metrical pattern, that is, it is not ordered into feet. Free verse has irregular line length and it uses a rhythm that suits the meaning and sounds. Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is an example for free verse.

3. **Heroic couplet:** A verse form introduced into English by Geoffrey Chaucer, it is written in iambic pentameter which rhymes in pairs: aa, bb, cc, and so on. It was called heroic, due to its frequent usage in heroic poems and in heroic dramas.

Recap

- ▶ Poetry can be broadly divided into objective poetry and subjective poetry, which can be in turn divided into ballad, epic, metrical romance, dramatic monologue, limerick, lyric, ode, elegy, idyll, sonnet, haiku, etc.
- ▶ Ballads can be divided into popular ballad, broadside ballad, and literary ballad.
- ▶ Odes can be divided into Pindaric ode, Horatian ode and Cowleyan ode.
- ▶ Poetic diction refers to the specialized language used particularly in poetry.
- ▶ Poetic devices are tools used to create a special effect in poems which includes alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, rhyme and rhythm, apostrophe, euphemism, hyperbole, irony, simile, metaphor, etc.
- ▶ Metre is the rhythmic arrangement of stresses in a line of verse.
- ▶ The different feet in English include iamb, anapaest, trochee, dactyl, spondee
- ▶ Blank verse, free verse and heroic couplet are different verse forms.

Objective Questions

1. Why is broadside ballad called so?
2. What are Homeric similes?
3. Who perfected the dramatic monologue?
4. Who introduced irregular odes?
5. What is the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet?
6. What is scansion?
7. What is Blank Verse?
8. What is the use of mixed metaphors for a specific artistic effect known as?
9. Which literary age in English was famous for adhering to the principle of decorum?
10. Which poetic device was popularised by French symbolist poets?

Answers

1. Because it is printed on one side of a single sheet which is called broadside.
2. Long and formal in nature, used to make an elaborate comparison is called Homeric similes. It is also called epic simile.
3. Robert Browning
4. Abraham Cowley
5. **abab cdcd efef gg**

6. The art of identifying the metre of a poem
7. Verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter
8. Catachresis
9. Neoclassical age
10. Synesthesia

Assignments

1. Read Alexander Pope's poem "The Rape of the Lock" and describe how it is a mock poem?
2. Identify the end rhyme, masculine rhyme and feminine rhyme in Wordsworth's poem "The Solitary Reaper".
3. What are the different types of verses in English poetry?
4. Write a detailed note on the poetic devices that make use of the meaning of words.
5. Differentiate between metonymy and synecdoche.
6. What are the different types of ironies?
7. What are the different poetic devices that make use of sounds?

Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
2. Ashok, Padmaja. *A Companion to Literary Terms*. Orient, 2015.
3. Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford UP, 2015.
4. Packard, W. *The Poet's Dictionary: A Handbook of Prosody and Poetic Devices*. Harper, 1989.

Unit 3
Sonnet 116
William Shakespeare

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
- ▶ define some of the predominant features of the sonnet
- ▶ detail the significance of William Shakespeare as a sonneteer
- ▶ describe the key themes explored in the selected text
- ▶ list the predominant stylistic elements used in the selected text

Prerequisites

The sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines written in iambic pentameter and arranged in a specific rhyme scheme. The word 'sonnet' is derived from the Italian word *sonetto* which means 'a little sound'. It was established by the Italian master Petrarch as a major form of love poetry. Sonnets are of two forms-the Petrarchan sonnet and the Shakespearean sonnet. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey developed the English sonnet, after experimenting with the Italian form. Shakespeare (1564–1616) was its greatest practitioner, and hence the name Shakespearean sonnets. It is also referred to as Elizabethan or English sonnets, which falls into three quatrains (four lines) and a concluding couplet rhyming **abab cdcd efef gg**. The couplet presents a conclusion, amplification, or even refutation of the previous three stanzas.

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets and was published in his 1609 'quartos'. Of them, the first 126 are addressed to a young man whom he calls the "fair youth". The identity of this young man is not certain. The possibility can be either William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke or Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton. The remaining sonnets are addressed to a mysterious woman known as 'Dark Lady'. His sonnets dealt with various themes, such as the nature of love, relationships, passage of time, infidelity, beauty and so on. Our present sonnet to study is "Sonnet 116", first published in 1609. It talks about the immortality of love, i.e., love should exist independently of temporal concerns.

Keywords

Love, Nature of relationships, Passage of time, Beauty and mortality

Discussion

The poem

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his
height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and
cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and
weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

You might have heard of *Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, The Tempest*. But William Shakespeare is not only a dramatist but also an established poet. Will you believe that he had written 154 sonnets? Now we can go through his "Sonnet 116". In this sonnet, he expressed his thoughts regarding true love. The paraphrasing of the poem can be read from the following paragraph:

I don't accept that anything can prevent two people from being genuinely in love with one another. Love is not real love if it changes with the change in circumstances or gets removed when someone is trying to remove it. Love is a mark fixed forever that will not even shake in an impetuous storm. Do you know how I will compare love? No, no, not to roses. I will compare love to a star. Love is like a North star that guides the wandering ships in the seas. You may measure the height of the star, but you can never estimate the worth or value of the star. Similarly, love is priceless and you can't measure it. Love is not a fool of Time (Death). Rosy lips and cheeks that mark the

youthfulness in a person may fade with time, but not love. Love will not change with the passing of hours or weeks, but uphold it until the death or even after death. If my words are wrong, and if you prove so from my behavior, then I have never written a poem and no man has ever loved.

1.3.1 Analysis

The sonnet reflects that the intensity of true love is immeasurable. In the first quatrain, Shakespeare talks about the steadfastness in love. He uses the word "marriage" to denote true love. In the second quatrain, the poet uses a metaphor to support his stance, the metaphor of a guiding star to the wandering sailors in a tempest. The progression of thought is smooth. For instance, in the first quatrain, the speaker explains what love is not and in the second quatrain he tells what love is. This continues with the third quatrain as well. Here he writes about the unsusceptible nature of love towards its greatest enemy, time. Beauty may fade with time, but not true love. It "bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom". It reminds us of what Virgil said in his Eclogue, "Love conquers all". The final couplet presents a bold closing statement by challenging the readers to prove whether he is wrong in his thought. If so, then no man has ever loved. It reflects the poet's emotional conviction in love.

Through the capitalization of its first letter of Time, it is personified in the poem, so that it is presented as a strong figure which rules over human affairs. In line 11, the poet speaks of "his brief hours and weeks". This suggests that Time has some ownership over man's existence. This "Time" can also refer to the linear system of counting the days of human life. Love, however, is not a fool of time. The poet suggests by stressing the words "not" in the first foot and "fool" in the second foot, that love does not belong to time. Hence, even

though moments of human life are measured in "brief hours and weeks", time cannot alter the course of love.

1.3.2 Structure of the Poem:

As we have repeatedly mentioned, this is a typical Shakespearean sonnet. It consists of three quatrains (four lines) and a concluding couplet rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg*. The poem is written in iambic pentameter – a line of five feet in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable. Tone of the poem is passionate and assertive.

1.3.2.1 Literary Devices:

- ▶ Alliteration: Repetition of consonant sounds
  - • /m/ - ".. marriage of true minds"
- ▶ Personification – Time is personified as a reaper

- ▶ Hyperbole – Extravagant exaggeration of facts or possibilities. In the poem, the constancy of life is presented through the line "but bears it out even to the edge of doom" is an example for hyperbole
- ▶ Metaphor – an idea or object is substituted by another to show the similarity between the two. For example, love is compared to the North Star – "It is the star to every wand'ring bark"
- ▶ Polyptoton – figure of speech that consists of repetition of words derived from the same root. In the poem we have the lines:

"Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove"

Recap

- ▶ True love conquers even death
- ▶ The first quatrain says that love is not changeable with the change in circumstances
- ▶ The second quatrain says it is ever fixed, unshaken by tempests
- ▶ The third quatrain talks about the influence of time on love.
- ▶ Love does not fade away with the passage of time
- ▶ The final couplet announces the certainty of the poet in Love
- ▶ Structure-typical Shakespearean sonnet
- ▶ Literary Devices-Alliteration, Personification, Hyperbole, Metaphor, Polyptoton

Objective Questions

1. How many sonnets did Shakespeare write?
2. What is the main theme of "Sonnet 116"?
3. What does Shakespeare compare love to?
4. What is the rhyme scheme of Shakespearean sonnets?
5. What is personified as a reaper in the poem?
6. Which idea is discussed in the first quartrain?

7. Why is 'Time' personified in the poem?
8. What is the term used to denote the repetition of words derived from the same root?
9. What does the final couplet reflect?
10. Which poetic device is used when love is compared to the North Star?

Answers

1. 154 sonnets
2. The constancy of love
3. To a North Star
4. abab cdcd efef gg
5. Time
6. The steadfastness of love
7. So that it can be presented as a strong figure which rules over human affairs
8. Polyptoton
9. The poet's emotional conviction in love
10. Metaphor

Assignments

1. Do you think "Sonnet 116" is relevant in today's materialistic world? Explain.
2. Attempt a critical appreciation of "Sonnet 116".
3. What are the structural patterns of "Sonnet 116"?
4. How does Shakespeare deal with the theme of love in "Sonnet 116"?
5. What are the poetic devices employed in "Sonnet 116"?
6. How does the poet employ hyperbole in "Sonnet 116" to convey his idea?

Suggested Readings

1. Alden, Raymond Macdonald, ed. *The Sonnets of Shakespeare*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1916.

2. Atkins, Carl D., ed. *Shakespeare's Sonnets: With Three Hundred Years of Commentary*. Fairleigh U P, 2007.

3. Evans, G. Blakemore (editor). *The Sonnets*. Cambridge UP, 2013.

4. Garrigues, Gertrude. "Shakespeare's Sonnets". *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1887, pp. 241–58. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25668140.

5. Post, Jonathan F.S. *Shakespeare's Sonnets and Poems*. Oxford, 2017.

Unit 4
Lycidas

John Milton

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ define some of the predominant features of the pastoral elegy
▶ detail the significance of John Milton as a poet
▶ describe the key themes explored in "Lycidas"
▶ list the predominant stylistic elements used in the selected text

Prerequisites

The significant writer of the English Civil war period, John Milton (1608 – 1674) is best known for the greatest epic poem in English, *Paradise Lost*. Milton was not only a poet, but also a prose writer who wrote about various themes concerning radical political topics. He was a polyglot and wrote both in Latin and English. His writing covers three periods: Stuart England; the Civil War and Interregnum; and the Restoration. His greatest poems were published after the Restoration period. His *Paradise Lost* (10 books – 1667; later revised in 12 books in 1674), written in blank verse – is the only literary epic in English. Milton was the advocate of the puritans or the roundheads during the English Civil War. He wrote many anti-monarchical and anti-religious pamphlets. He laid stress on freedom of conscience and civil liberty.

Our present poem for study "Lycidas" belongs to his 'Horton period' (when he lived in Horton) of 'minor poems', which represents his effort of self-education in writing English poems. It was written to commemorate the death of his fellow student at Cambridge, Edward King, a budding poet and an aspiring priest. Edward King died on 10 August 1637, in his youth, drowning in the Irish seas, before meeting his true potential. Months after his death, in November 1637, King's fellow students at Christ College were publishing a collection called *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago* (1638) to commemorate him. "Lycidas" was Milton's contribution to this memorial anthology. King's untimely death reminded Milton of his own mortality.

The poem logically progresses through his questioning of life in which the reader can find out his pagan influence and his reply in consolation under the Christian influence. The poem is not just a lamentation, but it also shows the growth of imaginative power in Milton as a poet.

Milton adopted the conventions of the pastoral elegy in "Lycidas", making it one among the five major pastoral elegies in English. The title alludes to Theocritus' "Idylls." Lycidas was a shepherd in Virgil's "Eclogues" also. Other major pastoral elegies are Spenser's "Astrophel" written for Sidney, Shelley's "Adonais" written for Keats, Tennyson's "In Memoriam" written for Arthur Henry Hallam, and Arnold's "Thyrsis" written for Arthur Hugh Clough.

Keywords

Pastoral Elegy, Friendship, Death, Invocation, Lamentation

Discussion

John Milton , a delicate young man with long hairs – called as Lady of Christ (Lady of Christ College – Cambridge).

John Milton wrote "Lycidas"as a way of mourning the death of his young friend Edward King. The elegy is written in the conventional way by addressing laurels, myrtles and ivy, that are usually used to crown heroes. The paraphrasing of the poem could be read from the following section:

I came to pluck fruits rudely even before their mellowing (ripening) season because I was forced to do it. I disturbed them because I was in such a situation. I will tell you the reason. My Lycidas died prematurely, but I was sure that he had not left us. Everybody would sing for him as he is a poet himself. Lycidas wrote great poems. He must not float upon his watery tomb unmourned. He deserved some 'melodious tears'. By melodious tears, I mean a poem.

I invoked the muses, i.e. the Sisters of the sacred well (sacred well refers to either Aganippe or Hippocrene, streams that spring from Mount Helicon, the residing place of muses) that springs near the seat of Jove / Jupiter (king of Gods in Roman mythology) to begin and sweep their string loudly. What I meant was to inspire me to write a poem for my beloved Lycidas. I plead with the muses to let me write a verse for Lycidas, without any useless denial or excuses, so that one day a gentle muse would inspire someone to write a poem when I die. And some passersby might wish me to rest in peace, when they pass by my grave.

Lycidas and I grew up in the same countryside (reference to Cambridge). We took care of our flocks of sheep together. We were together from the early morning till the sunset, driving the herd. We composed poems or rural songs (ditties) to the tune of the oaten flute (flute made from the dried stalks of oat plant) and mythological characters like Satyrs and Fauns danced to our songs. Old Damaetas (may be

alluding to a tutor at Cambridge) loved to hear our songs.

A heavy change happened in my life with Lycidas' death. He has gone to a world from where he never returns. The shepherd, the woods, and uninhabited caves which are overgrown with wild plants and vines mourned his death. Trees like willows and hazel lament his death by shedding their green color and stop fanning their leaves to Lycidas' melodious lyrics (soft lays). I felt Lycidas' death as killing as canker (disease infesting plants) to rose, as taint-worms (intestinal worms that kill young calves) to weanling calves, and as frost to flowers. It was such a great loss for me.

Then I started to question the nymphs. Lycidas was so dear to them. Where were they when he was drowning? They were not present at their usual spots like the mountain (steep) where old poets and Druids (poet kings of Celtic origin) are buried. They were neither on the top of the Mona high (reference to the island of Anglesey) nor near Deva river (reference to River Dee that flows through Wales and England). But even if they were there, they would not be able to do anything. They would have been helpless. Even Calliope, a muse herself, could not save his son Orpheus, for whom the whole universe lamented. His blood covered face was washed through the river Hebrus to the island of Lesbos. Then how can the nymphs save Lycidas?

Grief-stricken, I asked what would I gain by continuing this shepherd's trade (reference to writing poetry), if the muse is not ready to inspire me. It was better to sport with Amaryllis in the shade or to play with Naera's hair, like others. Fame is the motivation for us to scorn delight and work harder each day. As Tacitus says "the desire of glory is the last infirmity cast off even by the wise". But when we are about to find our reward (guerdon) for the hard labor, the blind fury (reference to Atropos, one of the three Fates who cut the thread of life) comes out with scissors and cuts the thread of life. And suddenly the God of poetry, Phoebus (Roman name of Apollo) intervened with a reply that praise is not destroyed by the fury of death. Phoebus said so by touching my trembling ears and he continued: fame does not grow on this mortal soil. You cannot find it in the reputations (glistering foil) or in rumors. It is the all-judging Jove or Jupiter who sees every deed of ours, decides who should receive fame and honor. So man must expect his reward in heaven.

Then I addressed spring Arethusa and river Mincius and told them that the voice I heard (of Phoebus) was of a higher order. And I continued my oat (song). I listened to the Herald of the Sea or messenger of the sea (Triton), who came with the God of sea, Neptune's plea, that he was innocent of what happened to Lycidas. Triton asked the waves and savage winds what unfortunate event has caused the death of this young gentleman? Then he questioned every bird. But none of them knew anything. Sage Hippotades (God of winds) brought an answer to Triton that no winds had strayed away from his dungeon (prison). The air was calm and the sea nymph Panope and her sisters (associated with calm weather) were playing in the sea water (brine). None of them were responsible for the death of Lycidas. Then who was responsible for Lycidas' death? Hippotades told me that it was the ship (bark) built during the time of eclipse that betrayed Lycidas and proved fatal. It is this deceitful ship (perfidious bark), filled with dark curses that caused his death.

Then I saw reverend sire Camus (River Cam which runs near Cambridge University) walking slowly. He wore a fur coat and a hat with

a sedge flower. This bonnet sedge was similar to a "sanguine flower inscribed with woe" (water hyacinth). He asked "who has robbed away my dearest child, Lycidas?". And finally, the Pilot of the Galilean lake, St. Peter came and he was the last one to go as well. He had two massive keys made with two different metals, with him. The golden one was used to open the gate and the iron key was used to close it tightly. Saint Peter shook his mitred locks (refers to the headdress that Bishops wear) and spoke sternly how he could have saved Lycidas, and he was fed up with such clergymen who entered ministry out of worldly motives and materialistic prospects. These materialistic clergy do not care about others and their only concern is how to scramble at a shepherd's feast. To make it happen, they do not hesitate to drive away the invited and worthy guests. They are "blind mouths' ', and they don't know how to hold the sheephook. They don't know at least the basics of a herdman's art. What do they care for? Do they need anything as they are provided with everything? They choose to sing songs that lack meaning and depth and it sounds terrible when they play them on their scrannel pipes. The hungry sheep (common people) look up to them but they are not fed with what they require, but with wind and mist, i.e. the false doctrines. So they decay inwardly and this rotten state is spreading among them. Despite all these, the sheep are attacked by the grim wolves who devour them fast with a hidden agenda (privy paw) and nobody questions it. But there will be a two-handed engine (scissors like weapon) at the door to hit them and once hit, they will be no more. Thus St. Peter assured me that these corrupt clergy will have to pay the price for their deeds one day.

When St. Peter concluded his fearful speech, I requested the God of river Alpheus to return, whose stream got shrunk at the voice of St. Peter. I also requested the Sicilian Muse to return and I told them to tell the vales (winds) to send flowers of different colours. Then I addressed the valleys with shades, carefree winds and gushing streams, and so bright and beautiful to the extent that the brightest star Sirius cannot lit up more. I asked the valley to throw their strange-coloured eyes, i.e. to shower their multi-coloured flowers that suck the 'honied showers' (sweet rainwater) from the green ground and fill the ground with purple coloured vernal flowers (spring flowers). I further asked the valley to bring primrose which blossoms early (rathe) and dies if its forsaken, the wild hyacinth (tufted crow-toe), jasmine, pink flowers and pansy flowers which are streaked with black color (suggesting that they are mourning the death of Lycidas). I also asked the valley to bring violet flowers, musk-rose and the good-looking woodbine and pale-looking cowslip flowers that hang their head down in pensive thoughts and every flower that seems to appear sad. I told the valley to ask amaranthus to shed its beauty and daffodils to shed tears. I wanted these flowers to decorate the coffin of Lycidas. I know there is no hearse for Lycidas in real life as he died drowning in the sea. Yet I engage myself with this 'false surmise' to comfort myself. The shores and the seas may have washed away your body and your bones are hurled somewhere, may be beyond the stormy Hebrides, where you got caught under the overwhelming tide and visited the bottom of the monstrous world or whether, despite our tearful prayers, you may be sleeping by the fable of Belarus (from the Latin word Bellerium meaning land's end), from where one can see Namancos and Bayana's hold (2 port cities in Spain). Still I want you, angel Lycidas, to look homewards and melt with grief. To make it more simpler, I will tell you again, i.e., whether he is stuck beneath the ocean or resting at land's end, I asked Lycidas to look homewards. And I requested Dolphins to carry the hapless youth back to home.

I told my fellow shepherds not to weep anymore because now I believe that Lycidas is not dead although he was drowned. He is still alive in all our hearts. How can you say that he is dead just because he drowned. So does the day star or the sun. It too sinks in the ocean bed but again rises in the morning and adorns ("tricks") his beams with newly sparkling gold. Similarly, Lycidas will also mount high with the help of Jesus Christ, who walked on the waves. Lycidas has risen to Heaven, where he spends his time among different trees and streams. He washes ("leaves") his slimy hair in the nectar and he hears inexpressive wedding songs in that blessed kingdom of love and joy. There, all the saints gathered together in troops to entertain him by singing for him and wiping away his tears forever. So my dear Lycidas, the shepherds will not mourn anymore. Because, hereafter, you are the guardian spirit ("Genius") of this shore who guides those wandering in this dangerous ocean. This is the recompensation or reward for your premature death.

Now I will tell you something about myself as a narrator. I am an "uncouth swain" and I sang this song to the oak trees and streams. The morning was giving way to evening and I sang this pastoral song ("Doric lay") by playing on some pipes. As the sun started to set, I rose up and took my mantle, for an optimistic tomorrow.

1.4.1 Analysis

"Lycidas" can be regarded as the high watermark of English poetry. The main narrator of the poem is an "uncouth swain". He begins by addressing the laurels and myrtles in a classical style, considered the symbols of poetic creativity. He states his reluctance to begin the work – he came to pluck berries(that suggests his poetic composition) harsh and crude. Or you can also give another rhetorical meaning

that he is writing yet another pastoral elegy. Laurels, myrtle and ivy are considered as 'ancient tokens of poethood'. Laurel symbolizes intellect (Apollo), Myrtle symbolizes heart (Aphrodite) and Ivy symbolizes passion and spontaneity (Dionysus). These – mind, heart, spontaneity and imagination- together create artistic genius. Then he presents the occasion of writing this poem. He talks about the premature death of the unmellowed King. The speaker implies King's death by drowning in the phrase "wat'ry bier'.

He invoked the muses, the sisters of the sacred well. They are the nine muses, supposed to be the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (the Goddess of memory). He invoked them to inspire him to write a verse for King. In the next section, he gives a pastoral description of his life at Cambridge with Edward King. In the fourth section, the poet describes nature's lament in detail. In this, the poet employs the technique of pathetic fallacy, i.e., attributing human feelings and responses to inanimate things or animals. In the fifth section, the poet blames the nymphs for not protecting Lycidas. But here he realizes the truth that death is inevitable. He tries to universalize his lament. Moreover, in the reference to the death of Orpheus, Milton is reminded of the first tragic death of a poet.

In the sixth section, Milton digresses thinking about the fate of great poets. He laments the plight of great poets. They work hard to write poetry, live their life laboriously and when they are about to become famous, they die. But amateur poets who write silly poetry win fame. Milton thinks that it was better to remain as an amateur poet (reference to sporting with Amaryllis and Naera). Soon Phoebus interferes to tell him that the fame and honor are bestowed in heaven. Here, Milton's Puritanic belief can be traced.

River Camus appears as a mourner and he is compared to a hyacinth. In Greek mythology, Hyacinth was a Spartan prince of remarkable beauty and a lover of the sun god Apollo. One day when they were playing, the young man got hit and he died in a pool of blood. Apollo turned him into the flower Hyacinth and wrote the words 'AI' in its petal, 'AI' in Greek means 'Alas!'. That is why Milton used the phrase "sanguine flower inscribed with woe". It is the symbol of love and tragic death.

The poem deviates to take a criticism against the clergy and Roman church. It marks a shift from his pagan influences to Christian references. He shows the materialistic side of clergymen. For their prosperous life, they shove away worthy people. He calls them blind mouths as they are blinded by their materialistic cravings. Through the persona of St.Peter, Milton talks about the corruption in the Roman church. The common people are attacked by the church(grim wolves) everyday with a hidden agenda (privy paw).

After expressing his grief, Milton tries to console himself and his readers through his belief in immortality and life after death in eternity. These are clear depictions of his Christian faith. The poem is thus a mixture of classical, supernatural and Christian elements.

1.4.2 Lycidas as a Pastoral Elegy

▶ Remarkable for its adherence to convention:
- Invocation of the muses
- Lament of nature
- Procession of mourners
- Personal digression
- Concluding consolation

▶ The title itself is a conventional name of a shepherd and the speaker calls himself an "uncouth swain".

▶ Remembers his happy days as shepherds with Lycidas.

▶ The mourner blames the negligence of nymphs and other guardians for the death of Lycidas.

▶ Digression in Lycidas
- When Milton realizes that everybody has to die one day, he is disillusioned thinking about the use of all this hard work. He questions the meaning of his pursuits and the justice of fate. Phoebus replies to him that "fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil". That means we should work hard for our mind's satisfaction and not for fame. Fame and honor will come in the course of time, we should not go after that.

- Attacking the corrupt clergy through the persona of St. Peter

▶ This poem blends the Hellenic elements with Christian elements, lamentation with his political views.
- Shepherd's attachment with nature and pagan Gods and the Christian notion of Shepherd's allegiance to heaven can be seen in the poem.

1.4.3 Structure of the Poem

▶ This poem of 193 lines is a monody, i.e., a dirge presented as the utterance of a single person. The stanzas are of unequal length and there is no regular metre or rhyme scheme. Yet it employs iambic pentameter in some lines. For example: "Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere". Although the poem has no specific rhyming, in the epilogue the poem changes its rhyme to **ottava**

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rima rhyming **ababccc** (Ottava rima is an Italian stanza form composed of eight lines, each line is 11 syllabled and it rhymes **abababcc**).

► The poem is patterned as starting with his rebellion, resignation, anger, and finally shows the acceptance by the speaker.

► The poem has several narrators - "uncouth swain", Phoebus (Apollo), Camus (river cam), Pilot of the Galilean Lakes (St. Peter) – and the poet changes the form of the poem with each new voice.

► He asks rhetorical questions in between: who would not sing for Lycidas?, "Had ye bin there' – for what could that have done?". Rhetorical questions do not expect any answer or response from us, but it makes us think in a reflective manner.

1.4.3.1 Literary Devices

► Apostrophe: A figure of speech used by the poet to address directly an absent person or an abstract idea or a non-human entity. In the poem, the speaker addressed laurels, myrtles and ivy in the first section, Lycidas in the fourth section, and valleys in the ninth section.

► Symbols: Laurel symbolizes intellect (Apollo), Myrtle symbolizes romantic desire (Aphrodite) and ivy symbolizes passion and spontaneity (Dionysus).

► Personification:
  • River Cam (to personify Cambridge University.) as sire who walks slow
  • Sky – giving it a human forehead (Flames in the forehead of the morning sky")

► Allusions to mythological characters– to the nine muses, Calliope and her son Orpheus, Amaryllis, Naera, Alpheus, Arethusa

► Similes:
  • He compares Lycidas' loss to him as killing as canker to roses, taint-worms to young calves and frost to flowers
  • Bonnet sedge of Camus is compared to a sanguine flower inscribed with woe (i.e. hyacinth)
  • Drowning of Lycidas is compared to the setting of the sun.

► Metaphor – shepherd's trade (poet)

► Synecdoche – poetic device in which a part of something is used to refer to the whole. Here "wings'' are used to refer birds and "blind mouths" to refer to clergymen

Recap

► "Lycidas" is a pastoral elegy written to commemorate Edward King

► Key events include :

1) invocation of the muses
2) nature's lamentation
3) procession of mythological characters as mourners
4) digressions
5) the speaker's acceptance of death and hope for immortality

- ▶ The poet describes his personal sorrow by universalizing it
- ▶ The poet uses the death of Lycidas to reflect on the precariousness of life
- ▶ Milton comments on the social and political issues of the time-degeneration and corruption of the clergymen

Objective Questions

1. Who is commemorated in the poem "Lycidas"?
2. Which image appears throughout "Lycidas"?
3. Who comes last for the funeral procession?
4. Who is regarded as the pilot of the Galilean lake?
5. Which pagan God appears in the poem?
6. Whose daughters are the nine muses?
7. Which technique is used to attribute human feelings and responses to inanimate objects and animals?
8. Which literary genre involves the convention of a 'personal digression'?
9. Whom does the speaker refer to as 'blind mouths'?
10. What does the myrtle symbolise?

Answers

1. Lycidas
2. Water
3. Pilot of the Galilean lake
4. St. Peter
5. Phoebus (Apollo)
6. Zeus and Mnemosyne
7. Pathetic Fallacy
8. Pastoral elegy
9. Clergymen
10. Romantic Desire

Assignments

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem "Lycidas".
2. Discuss "Lycidas" as a Pastoral Elegy.
3. Detail the poetic devices employed in "Lycidas".
4. Comment on the structure of "Lycidas".
5. How does Milton capture his life at Cambridge with Edward King?

Suggested Readings

1. Hanford, James Holly, "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's Lycidas". *PMLA*. 25 (3) 1910: 403–447.
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3. Sacks, Peter M. "*Milton: Lycidas*". *John Milton*. Harold Bloom. Chelsia, 2004.
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Unit 5
A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning
John Donne

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
- ▶ define some of the predominant features of metaphysical poetry
- ▶ detail the significance of John Donne as a poet
- ▶ describe the key themes explored in the selected text
- ▶ list the predominant stylistic elements used in the selected text

Prerequisites

A metaphysical poet and a priest in the Church of England, **John Donne (1572 – 1631)** belongs to the Elizabethan Age. His realistic and argumentative language, modeled on actual speech, provides logical and psychological insights. But we need a different sensibility to understand that. Donne uses witty, thought-provoking metaphysical conceits (conceits are extended metaphors that compare two extremely dissimilar things), as opposed to the idealized and romantic metaphors of the Elizabethan age. Let us look at the context of the poem "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning". The poet is going to France with Sir Robert Drury and he is advising his beloved Anne Moore in England, not to mourn like an ordinary couple when they bid farewell to each other. Although written in 1611, the poem was published in 1675 in the fourth edition of *Life of Donne*. Love, separation and reunion are the predominant themes in the poem. With this understanding, let's start reading the poem.

Keywords

Metaphysical poetry, Conceits, Valediction, Unification of sensibility

Discussion

How do you bid farewell to your loved ones when you leave for a faraway place? If you ask this question to a poet, how do you think he/she will reply? Maybe they will talk about how sad they are, how lonely they are and so on. But here, John Donne challenged these familiar and conventional methods of farewell.

Let me take you to the poem which uses logical comparisons to explain the speakers' Platonic love towards his beloved wife. The poem could be paraphrased as follows:

First stanza: I think about virtuous people, who are wiser and not afraid of death. They realise it when their time comes, and whisper to their souls to depart from this earthly world. They pass away so quietly to the extent that those people around them at their deathbed are confused whether their breath has left. Some would say "he is dying now" while some others would say "no, we didn't see any sign".

Second stanza: Like virtuous people passing away silently, we (my lover and I) melt or depart without making any noise. We don't create a flood out of our tears, nor raise a storm-sized sigh like some lovers react. When they make such noises, the world will be aware of their suffering. Had we behaved like this, it would have been an insult to our joys. Our sacred love must not be exposed before the common people (laity).

Third stanza: There is a difference between ordinary love reactions and elevated or mature reactions while parting. Haven't you noticed an earthquake (moving of the earth)? It harms and evokes fear in people. They will talk about the damage, and what this earthquake actually meant? Is it a sign of any imminent disaster? There is a greater trembling movement (trepidation), the movement of the Spheres, i.e., the planets revolving around the sun. Yet it does not make any noise. Nobody is aware of the rotation and revolution of the earth. Everybody discusses the visible effects in an earthquake, but the trepidation of the spheres is of immense magnitude that is never a subject of discussion among the laity. Similarly, our love is also very special, which is beyond a common man's understanding.

In stanzas Four, Five and Six, it is made clear why physical separation is not a big issue. Insensitive, earthly lovers ("dull sublunary lovers") cannot accept the absence of their loved one. Because their love is confined to their senses alone. The absence removes the physical body of the beloved one, which is very fundamental (elemental) for their love to continue. But our love is so refined and it is still a mystery to me and my lover. We are so sure about ourselves so we don't care about any sense organs that give us bodily pleasures. Distance will not separate us. Therefore my absence would not cause any breach (gap or distance) within our two souls, which are made one by love. My departure will only expand our love like gold beaten into a thin sheet. The more we beat the gold, it will spread and not break. Similarly, the more we suffer from our parting, the more we expand in our love.

Seventh stanza: Two souls are compared to a compass. Think of a compass which we use to draw circles. Our two souls are made into one by love. But if they remain as two souls, then it is like the two legs of a compass which appear to be separate, but in reality they are united at the top. My lover's soul is like a fixed foot as she always stays at home. It seems like the fixed foot is not moving, but in reality it moves, if the other foot moves.

My beloved stands firm as the fixed foot of a compass. But when I, like the other leg, roam farther, she leans and listens (hearkens) after me. And she stands upright (erect) when I return home. Home is the place where I feel complete because it is her firmness and steadfast loyalty that make me complete my circle. In the last stanza, it is made clear that my beloved is like a fixed foot to me, who wanders and runs like the other foot of the compass to do many things. Her firmness motivates me to return to the place where I began.

1.5.1 Analysis

Regarded as "the tenderest of Donne's love poems" (Grierson), "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" is the poet's thought on

physical separation between true lovers. The term 'Valediction' comes from the Latin verb *valedicere* meaning to bid farewell. The poem speaks of a condition where time and distance will not diminish the strength of the relationship. It is a typical example of metaphysical poetry. Let us see a few of its features from the poem:
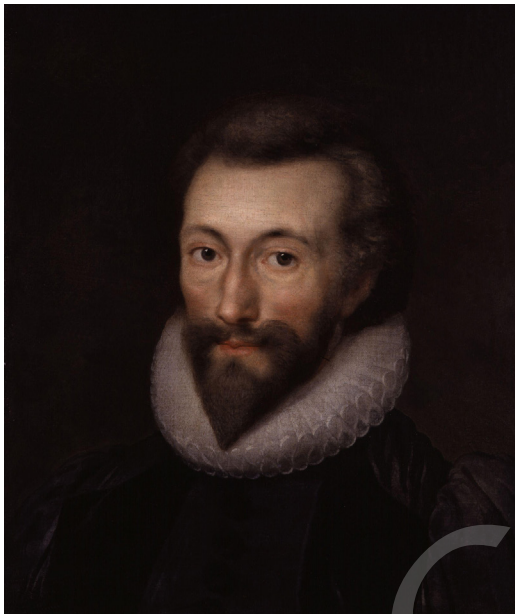
John Donne (1572 - 1631)

1. **Language of the poem**: The metaphysical poetry uses direct and conversational language to create an impact on the reader. In this poem, Donne uses striking but simple imagery, comprehensible enough to convey his thoughts and there is the presence of a listener to whom he directly speaks.

2. **Metaphysical Conceits**: Originally, the term conceit means 'an image'. As a figure of speech, it suggests 'the exaggerated juxtaposition of two dissimilar ideas'. Metaphysical conceit is described as a 'wit' which is a kind of Discordia concors, a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparent-

ly unlike…The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together" (Dr. Samuel Johnson in his essay "Life of Cowley" from *Lives of the Poets*). In the first stanza, he says the parting of lovers is analogous to the death of virtuous men. The most famous example of metaphysical conceit is the analogy of a compass to describe his union with his beloved.

3. **Use of hyperboles**: Hyperboles are "extravagant exaggeration of fact or of possibility, used either for serious or ironic or comic effect" (M.H.Abrams). Here the poet uses compound words like "tear-floods", "sigh-tempests" to suggest that their love is spiritual and they must not mourn and weep over their separation.

4. **Unification of sensibility**: T.S. Eliot defines it as "a fusion of thought and feeling". In this poem, Donne uses logical and reasonable comparisons, to illustrate his use of rationale to evoke an intense emotional feeling. You can say Donne has transformed logic into poetry.

5. **Donne draws imagery from several spheres of knowledge**: From philosophy (talking about death and reunion), astronomy (trepidation of spheres), spirituality (refined love), metallurgy (gold to airy thinness beat) and geometry (compass analogy).

Metaphysical Poetry:

The word 'meta' means 'beyond' and 'physical' means something verifiable or empirical. Thus metaphysical literally means 'beyond the purview of empirical knowledge.'

Dr. Samuel Johnson first used the term 'metaphysical poetry' in his book *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*(1779 – 1781) when he wrote about a group of 17th century British poets that included John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell and Henry Vaughan. It was critiqued in the 18th century for its false wit but was praised in the 20th century by writers like T S Eliot for the unified sensibility. Important features include:

- ▶ Abrupt openings
- ▶ Use of wits, conceits, paradox, puns
- ▶ Theme of carpe diem (seize the day)
- ▶ Use of syllogism and argumentation

1.5.2 Structure of the Poem

The poem has nine stanzas . Each stanza has 4 lines each. The rhyme scheme is **abab**. The poem is written in **iambic tetrameter**. Metre is the number of feet in a line of a poem. One metre consists of two syllables. So tetrameter is a line of four metre of eight syllables. Now, in an iambic metre, the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed. So, iambic tetrameter means a line of four feet in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable. For example:
"And **whisp**er **to** their **soul**s to **go**" (syllables in bold are stressed)

Recap

- ▶ The poem is a typical example of Metaphysical poetry
- ▶ The poem warns against mourning over separation of the lovers and emphasizes on spiritual love
- ▶ The poem employs four comparisons to highlight their Platonic love:
    1. death of virtuous men
    2. trepidation of planets
    3. gold when it is beaten
    4. feet of the compass

Objective Questions

1. What is the figure of speech used in line 6 – "tear-floods' and 'sigh-tempests'?
2. What does the poet consider as a profanation of their joys?
3. Why does the poet say that their love is like gold?
4. What is the metaphysical conceit used in the poem?
5. What is the tone of the poem?
6. What does the Latin term valedicere mean?
7. Which aspect of metaphysical poetry does T.S. Eliot highlight?
8. What type of language is used in the poem?
9. Which poetic meter is used in the poem?
10. What is 'discordia concors'?

Answers

1. Hyperbole
2. To tell the laity of their love
3. Because like gold, their love too will be expanded and will not break even if beaten.
4. Comparison of the lovers to a compass.
5. Serious, optimistic and melancholic.
6. Bid farewell
7. Unification of sensibility
8. Direct and conversational
9. Iambic tetrameter
10. Combination of dissimilar images

Assignments

1. How does the poem celebrate love?
2. Read other poems of Donne and understand its features as metaphysical poems.
3. Attempt a feminist reading of "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning".
4. Elaborate on the metaphysical conceit which explains love through a compass image.
5. What are the poetic devices employed in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning"?
6. Comment on John Donne's use of imagery.
7. What is meant by the notion of unification of sensibility?

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Suggested Readings

1. Guibbory, Achsah, Ed. *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*. Cambridge UP, 2006.

2. Redpath, Theodore. *The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne*. Taylor, 1967.

3. Targoff, Ramie. *John Donne, Body and Soul*. Chicago UP, 2008.

4. Tiempo, Edith L. *Introduction to Poetry*. Rex, 1993.

Unit 6
Resolution and Independence
William Wordsworth

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
- ▶ define some of the predominant features of Romantic poetry
- ▶ detail the significance of William Wordsworth as a poet
- ▶ describe the key themes explored in the selected text
- ▶ list the predominant stylistic elements used in the selected text

Prerequisites

The Age of Romanticism (1785 – 1825) observed great changes in European literature, art and culture. Its chief emphasis was on freedom of individual self-expression, where the heart ruled over the head. According to William Wordsworth(1770-1850), one of the most important proponents of Romanticism, poetry must come from the heart. Its function, according to him, is to enable the reader to discover universal truths. In the poem "Resolution and Independence", the poet speaks from his heart and the poem develops in thought to reach a universal truth about resolution in life to not to give up. Now let us look at the occasion of the poem. It is based on a real incident. Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy met a beggar who came to the door of Dove Cottage (House of Wordsworth). This man had been in the army. And after that, misfortunes fell upon him: his wife and nine out of ten children had died. His occupation was gathering leeches. But leeches were scarce, so he lived by begging. They met him when he was on the way to buy some books to sell. This event is recorded in Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal. Wordsworth's power of imagination that transferred this ordinary man into a symbol of indomitable will-power is the best way to understand the characteristics of Romanticism. The poem was written in 1802 and was published in the 1807 volume of *Lyrical Ballads*.

Keywords

Romanticism, Nature, Resolution, Independence

Discussion

There are moments in our life, we feel so unproductive and worthless. Many times, we tend to overthink and suffer more in our imagination. William Wordsworth is a central figure of English Romanticism. It is a leech-gatherer who opens the eyes of the poet and makes him understand about the value of life. This is elucidated in his poem "Resolution and Independence or The Leech Gatherer". Let us see

its stanza-wise paraphrasing in the following paragraphs.

William Wordsworth (1770 - 1850)

It was raining very heavily yesterday. Wind was blowing very strongly throughout the night. But this morning is tranquil and beautiful. In far away forests, birds are singing. European birds like stock-dove, jay and magpie are chirping and twittering. You can hear the pleasant noise of water flowing in brooks everywhere in the air.

The second stanza speaks about the vibrancy of morning. All things outside are happily enjoying the morning. Even the sky is rejoicing at the birth of dawn. The grass shines with dew-drops. On the moors (heath), the hare is running with joy. She runs through the muddy land creating mist. It seems that the glittering mist is following her wherever she runs. It is a wonderful sight to see.

I witnessed all these when I was traveling or you may say that I was wandering in the moor. I saw this joyous hare. I heard the birds chirping in the woods and water flowing in the distance. Wait, I do not remember whether I heard it. But one thing I was sure – I was as happy as a boy, without any worries. My heart

was as pleasant as that morning. I forgot about all the unwelcoming and unpleasant memories, the vain and melancholic ways of people. But sometimes, no matter how ecstatic and happy we are, we fall prey to dejection. It is quite natural to fall into depths of despondency when we are at the top of our happiness. I felt the same in that promising morning despite my pleasant mood. Imaginary fears overpowered me. I became sad and confused, without any reason. I don't even know what my thoughts are.

I heard a skylark singing in the sky and I thought over the playful hare. Like them, I am also a happy child of this Earth (God). Like them, I live blissfully, free of all anxieties and worries about the outside world. But I know that happiness will not last forever. There may come a day, when my happiness will be overtaken by solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty.

I accept that I lived happily all through my life, as if life is all about and only about happiness. I got everything without making any attempt of my own. My faith in God was very strong. But now a fear lurks within me that how long will all these blessings last. How can I expect that others will do things for me and love me when I fail to take care of myself?

As I was thinking about my own privilege as a poet, two other famous poets come to my mind – Thomas Chatterton and Robert Burns. Chatterton, who started writing at a very young age committed suicide at the age of 18 on account of his hurt pride and unfulfilled ambition. Robert Burns, another celebrated poet (known as the National Poet of Scotland), who led the life of a farmer in the mountainous part of Scotland also died at a young age due to bad health. We are worshiped by our own spirits. We, as poets started our career in gladness, enjoying fame at a very young age.

But like Chatterton and Burns, our life ends in despondency and madness.

Now, I don't know whether it was by luck or a peculiar grace, or a blessing from heaven, something happened. Do you know what? In that lonely place, when I was struggling with the tragic thoughts of Chatterton and Burns, beside the pool lying bare to the heaven's eye (sun), I saw a man unexpectedly. He appeared to be the oldest among white-headed old men. In stanza 9, it is described how he looks. He looked like a huge stone on the top of a mountain. Whoever sees the stone will wonder how it came to this place. The man, full of life, looked like a sea-beast that had emerged out of water to bask in the warmth of the sun.
He is an extremely old man neither completely alive nor dead nor inactive. His body was double-bent to the extent that his feet and head were so close together in his life-journey. I think a great burden of his intense pain or sickness from his past has bowed him down. He was carrying a weight too heavy for his old age.

He supported his body upon a long gray staff made of shaven wood. I approached this man at the pool-side. He stood there like a motionless cloud. But when he moves, his whole body moves, just like how clouds move when the wind blows.

After a while, when this old man was stirring the pond with his staff with great attention as if he was reading a book, I took a stranger's privilege to greet him with a promising morning and a glorious day.

He responded to my greeting with polite words. At first, I couldn't understand what he was doing there with his staff. So I asked him, "what are you doing here, in this deserted moor all alone?". Suddenly I saw a flash of surprise in his dark yet vivid eyes.

He answered me in a feeble voice, coming from a feeble chest. But his words were clear and precise. His choice of words and phrases were above the reach of ordinary men. His words were stately and majestic like the speech of Presbyterians of Scotland, who perform their duties towards God and man.

He is a leech-gatherer. His old age and impoverished life have compelled him to take up such hazardous and wearisome employment. He had to face many hardships. He wandered from pond to pond, from moor to moor, sometimes taking shelter by his own choice, or some other times, with the help of God, continuing to collect leeches to make his ends meet.

The old man continued talking to me. His voice became indistinct to me like the sound of a stream faraway. It was not clear and I could not make out the words. I felt that I had seen this man already in my dream or like a man sent from some distant land to instill moral strength in me through apt advice.

However, my previous disturbing thoughts came back to me. Fear of awaiting miseries and unfulfilled hopes brooded over me. I remembered the cold sufferings, labor, physical and mental illness that caused the untimely death of mighty poets. I got confused and longed to be comforted by someone. I turned to the old man and repeated my question about what he was doing and how he managed to live.

He has smiled at my question and replied again that he travels far and wide to collect leeches and stirs where leeches are found in large numbers. Earlier they were abundant but now the leeches are scarce, deteriorating slowly. Yet the old man is very committed to his job and continues with perseverance. He is

optimistic despite the difficulties, to find them where they are.

While he was talking, the lonely moor, the old man's figure and his feeble voice started troubling my mind. In my imagination, I saw the old man moving silently with weary steps on the moor, all alone. While I was immersed in these thoughts, the old man resumed his conversation after a pause.

He talked cheerfully about other matters as well. His attitude was kind, yet it was stately. When he ended the conversation, I scorned myself for being gloomy and diffident. I was astonished by the resolution and independence of this old man. He may be weak and feeble physically, but his indomitable will-power and firmness should be a model to all of us. I realised that God has always protected me and helped me in my crisis. I ended the poem by requesting God to be my guardian and I promised myself and to God that I will always think about this leech-gatherer on the lonely moor for the lesson he taught me with gratitude.

1.6.1 Analysis

"Resolution and Independence" alternatively titled as "The Leech Gatherer" suggests not only the resolution and independence of the leech-gatherer, but also of the speaker. The poem begins with a description of the beauty of nature. However, the poem is not just romantic in nature, but bears philosophical perspectives as well. In the initial stanzas, we find a great truth about life – life is a balance of happiness and sorrow. Nothing lasts forever. But how to deal with it is the crux of the poem, which is presented through an old man, a leech-gatherer.

1.6.2 Romantic Elements in the Poem

Poet's subjective experience: Poem is written from a subjective point-of-view, as he is narrating from his own life experience. This emotional directness is also visible in the language employed.

Poet's attitude to nature: Shelley called Wordsworth 'the poet of nature' and Matthew Arnold called him the 'High Priest of Nature' for his treatment of Nature as a subject. In the poem, he treated nature as a living being. He sees himself as a "traveler" upon nature. The purpose of nature is not just a provider of aesthetic pleasure but also that of a comforter. In stanza III, the poet says that his "old remembrances" and the evil ways of the world went from him completely when he wandered in the moor.

Nostalgia for the past: While walking upon the moor, the poet felt that he is as happy as a boy. While observing the singing skylark and the playful hare, he thinks of himself as a happy child of the Earth. In stanza VI, Wordsworth thinks about his past life of perfect happiness. Making the familiar unfamiliar: A leech-gatherer is a common sight, very familiar to all of us. But Wordsworth's brilliance lies in presenting him as a visionary or a prophet containing wisdom that is beyond the reach of mortal men.

Spiritualism: The stoic leech-gatherer's insight on life adds to his spiritualism/ mysticism. In stanza XVI, the poet says that this old man is sent from some faraway land to instill human strength in him and to teach him about the trust in divine providence.

1.6.3 Structure of the Poem

This is a lyric poem, written in 20 stanzas of 7 lines each. The rhyme scheme is **ababbcc**. Meter employed in the poem is iambic pentameter – a line of five feet in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable. Therefore, the form of stanza is rhyme royal (seven-line iambic pentameter stanza rhyming **ababbcc**).

1.6.3.1 Tone of the poem

The poem begins with a positive and happy tone, representing the joy of nature and its reflection in the speaker. From stanza four to seven, the tone is melancholic and despair. In the last three stanzas, the tone is that of a hopeful resolution.

1.6.3.2 Literary Devices

- Simile: an old man is compared to a huge stone which is in turn compared to a sea-beast

- Alliteration: Repetition of consonant sounds. For example, "fears and fancies", "chance or choice", "moor to moor"
- Imagery: mental pictures or verbal painting. For example, grass bright with rain drops; hare running races in her mirth…. raises a mist

The poem is, thus, a moral lesson for all humanity to endure crises in life with great fortitude.

Recap

- The poem expresses the significance of resolution and independence in a human being
- Begins with a detailed and beautiful description of a bright morning and nature
- The poet immersed in pensive thoughts meets a leech-gatherer who is very weak in physical appearance
- Leech-gatherer as the symbol of indomitable will

Objective Questions

1. What is the alternative title of "Resolution and Independence"?
2. How does Wordsworth describe the leech-gatherer?
3. Why did the poet scorn himself?
4. What did Shelley call Wordsworth?
5. What did Matthew Arnold call Wordsworth?
6. How does the poet treat nature in the poem?
7. What truth about life is emphasised in the poem?
8. Who is presented as a visionary in the poem?
9. What tone does the poem take in the last three stanzas?
10. Which poetic device is used in the comparison of an old man to a huge stone in the poem?

Answers

1. The Leech Gatherer
2. The old man looked like a huge stone on the top of a mountain and also like a sea-beast emerged out of water to bask in the warmth of the sun. He appeared as a repository of intense suffering and sickness.
3. On seeing the leech-gatherer's firmness of mind, the poet was ashamed of himself for being so gloomy.
4. The poet of nature
5. High Priest of Nature
6. As a living being
7. Life is a balance of happiness and sorrow
8. The Leech-gatherer
9. Hopeful resolution
10. Simile

Assignments

1. Relevance of the poem to the present day readers.
2. Analyse Wordsworth as 'the High Priest of Nature'
3. What are the romantic features in "Resolution and Independence"?
4. Comment on the structural importance of "Resolution and Independence"?
5. What philosophy does "Resolution and Independence" convey?
6. How does the Leech-gatherer appear as a symbol in "Resolution and Independence"?

Suggested Readings

1. Curran, Stuart, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*. Cambridge UP, 2003.
2. Gill, Stephen, editor. *William Wordsworth: 21st Century Oxford Authors*. Oxford UP, 2010.
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Unit 7
Ode to the West Wind

P. B. Shelley

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ define some of the predominant features of Romantic poetry

▶ detail the significance of P.B. Shelley as a poet

▶ describe the key themes explored in the selected text

▶ list the predominant stylistic elements used in the selected text

Prerequisites

One of the best known poets among the Young Romantics, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 -1822) lived a passionate, restless and brief life. Like other Romantics, Shelley's poetry too deals with nature, imagination, creativity, beauty, and political liberty. He never separated poetry and politics. Therefore, his poems show a revolutionary zeal and his desire to bring reforms in the society. His insatiable thirst for individual freedom as well as freedom of expression is seen in his works.

Our present poem for study, "Ode to the West Wind" was written in 1819 and published in 1820 in his collection *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts*, *with Other Poems*. In the introduction, Shelley wrote:"This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, [Italy] and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapors which pour down the autumnal rains." This poem was written when he was going through the toughest phase of his life. A few months before its composition, his son William died. The year before, his daughter died. As a result, his wife Mary Shelley got a nervous breakdown. He himself was suffering from bad health, rumors regarding his personal life, failure of his political hopes and even his writings were not acceptable to the public. All these mental agonies would have inspired him while composing this philosophical poem. When we consider the historical context, the poem was written months after the Peterloo Massacre. So the poem expresses his despair and his hope for a better tomorrow. It also indicates his thorough materialistic understanding about the world.

Keywords

The West Wind, Life Cycle, Poetic Creation, Human Limitations

Discussion

Have you ever thought of the possibility of being an invincible power? Have you ever admired anything for its double-edged power to create as well as destroy things? P.B. Shelley, a Romantic poet, who was called "mad Shelley" by his classmates for his unconventional beliefs has done so. In one of Shelley's important poems "Ode to the West Wind", he admires the powerful West Wind and laments at his powerlessness as a human being. The paraphrasing of the poem could be read from the following paragraphs.

P. B. Shelley (1792 - 1822)

The West Wind is the life-breath of Autumn season. He is invisible and can only be experienced. In his presence, the dead leaves scatter away, just like the ghosts that run away from a sorcerer. The fallen leaves are of different colours like yellow, black, pale and red and are similar to a crowd of people who are afflicted with disease. He carries the winged seeds to their cold beds inside the earth like a chariot. There the seeds lie cold as if in a grave. Each seed was like a dead body waiting for the West Wind's gentle sister Spring wind to come and blow her trumpet over the sleeping earth to awaken her and bring life to everything. Spring wind also creates sweet buds and feeds them in open air, like flocks of sheep. She fills the plain and hills with lively colour and odour, i.e., flowers. I appealed to the frantic but omnipresent West Wind that creates and destroys life to listen to me.

In the second canto, I realized the effect of the West Wind on the sky. The West Wind is passing through the sky and moves the clouds that appear like shedding leaves, shook from the entangled boughs of horizon. The clouds are like the messengers of rain and lightning. The West Wind drives away these loose clouds spread on the blue sky. I compare these clouds to the bright hair of Maenad, who is the female worshiper of Dionysus. It spreads from the horizon to the topmost level of the sky and looks like the hair of the West Wind itself. The blowing sound of the West Wind resembles to a dirge / funeral song of the dying year (West Winds occur during the autumn season from September to December) and that night appears as a dome of a vast sepulcher (tomb) made of clouds, whose arches are decorated with vapors. From the solid atmosphere of the clouds, heavy rain, lightning and hail will burst. I implore this mighty Wind to hear my plea.

In the third Canto, the West Wind wakes up the blue waters of Mediterranean Sea, who was lulled into sleep by the sound of its undercurrents. The sea was sleeping near an island made of pumice stones in the Bay of Baiae and dreamt of the old palaces and towers of ancient civilizations that now lie inside the water covered with sea plants and mosses. The image is so beautiful that I often fail to picturise it. I requested again the West Wind to hear my prayer, for whom the great Atlantic Ocean split itself to make a path for him to pass through while the sea plants and trees

covered with lifeless vegetation deep inside the sea turn pale with fear on hearing his roaring voice and tremble withering away their leaves.

In the fourth canto, some of the appeals are made to the West Wind. I wished if I were a dead leaf or a swift cloud or even a wave, so that I could share his strength even though I was not as free as this uncontrollable West Wind. In my childhood, I too was an unbridled boy as he is now. I could have even given him company when he wandered through Heaven. But I never thought of overcoming him ever, even in my dreams. So I called out to this omnipotent being to lift me up as a wave or a leaf or to drive me as if I am a cloud, because bitter and sharp thorns of life were pricking me. I was bleeding. Time with its heavy weight had chained me down, who was once uncontrollable, swift and proud like the West Wind.

In the final canto, I continued my earnest requests. I implored him to make me his lyre so that he can blow through me like he does to the forest. I am also in the autumn season of my life. The sound of Wind's blow has a pleasing effect. It will create a deep autumnal music out of me and the forest. It is sweet, even though there is sadness within it. I wish for his fierce spirit to be mine. Not just the spirit I want this impulsive Wind to be me. The adversities in life have made my thoughts dead. So I requested the wind to drive away my dead thoughts over the universe like how he scatters withered leaves because I wanted a rebirth at the earliest. By the recital of this poem, I wish to scatter my words among mankind as how an unextinguished hearth contains embers in ashes. I appealed to the wind to blow the trumpet of prophecy in order to awaken the unawakened earth, through my lips and verse. The poem comes to an end by asking a question to the omnipotent Wind: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?."

1.7.1 Analysis

The poem "Ode to the West Wind" expresses the melancholic trait of Romanticism. It is written in the form of an Ode, to the powerful force that can create and destruct – the West Wind. In the first, second and third cantos, the poet praises the wind for its effect on earth, sky and sea respectively. The fourth canto explains why the West Wind is invoked and speaks about the poet's wish to identify himself with West Wind. The final canto is the poet's prayer to the West Wind.

Written in the backdrop of the Peterloo Massacre, the poet connected it to the season of Fall and Winter. So the poem begins in a pessimistic tone and the poet seems to accept the overpowering nature of the West Wind as the thought develops. However towards the end of the poem, his acceptance evokes an optimism within him. He ends the poem with a universal truth – "if winter comes, can Spring be far behind?". He relates to the possibility of a future liberty. Although in an interrogative form, the poem affirms a universal truth. It also indicates Shelley's idealistic conviction that the world should be directed towards universal truths and ideas.

The poem also talks about the process of poetic creation. He prays to the Wind for poetic inspiration, blowing into the season of Winter and Autumn. The speaker beseeches the Wind to scatter his dead thoughts and arouse the dying embers in him. He yearns for individual as well as creative freedom.

1.7.2 The Major Romantic Traits in the Poem

1. **Love for nature**: The poet is seeking consolation in the West Wind, to heal his internal miseries. He wishes to be a wave, or a leaf, or a cloud so that his burdens will lose weight.

2. **His imaginative flight:** According to Shelley, "poetry is the expression of imagination". His imaginative capacity has its own uniqueness, that he makes use of his scientific knowledge to adorn his poetry with a different sensibility. With his imaginative power, he longs for an ideal world. In the poem he describes that the plants inside the ocean lose their green colour and turn pale because of the West Wind, while scientifically it is due to the lack of sunlight. This is one example of his ability to draw the readers into his world of imagination.

3. **Individual as melancholic and brooding in despair:** Romantic poetry stresses on the individuality, subjectivity, emotions and feelings. In this poem, the speaker is a lonely man suffering in an evil world and leading a life of thorns.

1.7.3 Structure and Form of the Poem

This is a lyric poem of five stanzas in the form of sonnets (each stanza containing 14 lines). It belongs to the genre of ode. The rhyme scheme employed is terza rima, i.e., interlinked tercets (tercet is a stanza of three lines) that end with a couplet, rhyming **aba bcb cdc ded ee**. The poet attempts to mimic the motion of the wind. The poem is written in an iambic pentameter but this pattern changes in some lines.

1.7.3.1 Poem as an Ode

Ode denotes a lyric poem that deals with a serious subject matter. It contains a message. It is a subjective poem triggered from a personal experience. In most of the cases, the poem begins from a personal distrust, grows through philosophical speculations and ends up in a kind of revelation. For example, in "Ode to the West Wind", the poet takes into account a serious issue of how powerless humans are, based on his personal experience. Finally, he attains the revelation that life is a balance of happiness and sorrows. Time will change the adversities into opportunities.

Odes are of three types: Pindaric ode, Horatian ode and Irregular ode. Pindaric odes, imitating Pindar's style, are written to praise or glorify someone. It consists of a strophe, antistrophe and an epode. Horatian odes, based on Horace, are calm, meditative and colloquial. It explores intimate scenes of daily life. They are less formal than Pindaric odes. Irregular Ode, also called the Cowleyan ode, has irregular stanzaic structure, unlike Pindaric or Horatian odes. Its stanzaic structure alters according to the mood and the subject.

According to the American literary critic Harold Bloom, the poem "Ode to the West Wind" employs the features of both Pindaric and Horatian Odes. It becomes Pindaric in the sense that it celebrates and glorifies the West Wind, whereas Horatian for its personal description of the poet and his contemplation on human sufferings.

1.7.3.2 Literary Devices

- ▶ Alliteration: Repetition of consonant sounds. For example:
  - /w/ - O Wild West Wind
  - /s/ - steep sky's
  - /g/ - grow gray

- ▶ Personification: Attribution of human qualities to nonhuman entities.
  - Here the West Wind is personified as a powerful person, who destroys the old order and the preserves the new.
  - Spring wind as the sister of West Wind blows her clarion.

- "The locks of approaching storm" gives storm a human like quality.
- Mediterranean Sea as a sleeping man, lulled by the sound of the crystalline streams.

▶ Apostrophe: A figure of speech which is a direct address to an abstract entity or an absent person. Many odes have employed this technique. Here, the poem is addressed to the West Wind, applying human characteristics to an inanimate thing.

▶ Anastrophe: A figure of speech in which the normal word order (often adjective and a noun) is reversed with the intention of emphasizing a word.
- "Leaves dead" – instead of dead leaves

▶ Symbolism: A form of conveying the poet's deeper thoughts as a symbol is representational.
- West Wind – power of nature as well as a revolutionary storm

- Winter – sufferings in human life, death, corruption and tyranny of his time
- Spring – Happiness, regeneration, new age

▶ Simile:
- Dead leaves falling in the air are compared to ghosts fleeing from a wizard.
- Winged seeds lying in the soil are compared to corpse within its grave.
- Loose clouds were compared to falling leaves and bright hair uplifted from the head of Maenad.

▶ Elision: Literary technique where an unstressed syllable, consonant or letter from a word is dropped to adjust the metre. For example,
- "Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth"
- "Lulled by the coil"
- "scarce seem'd a vision; I would ne'er have striven"

Recap

- ▶ West Wind as the preserver and destroyer of life
- ▶ In the first, second and third cantos, the poet praises the wind for its effect on earth, sky and sea respectively
- ▶ The fourth canto explains why the West Wind is invoked and speaks about the poet's wish to identify himself with West Wind
- ▶ The final canto is the poet's prayer to the West Wind
- ▶ The poem reflects the poet's love for liberty
- ▶ The poem is an ade
- ▶ The literary devices used are alliteration, personification, apostrophe, anastrophe, symbolism, simile, elision

Objective Questions

1. Whom does the poet invoke?
2. What is the tone of the poem?
3. What is the message conveyed by the poem?
4. What is the form of "Ode to the West Wind"?
5. What was the event which led to the writing of "Ode to the West Wind"?
6. How does the poem end?
7. What trait of romanticism is expressed in the poem?
8. Which elements are praised in the first, second, and third cantos?
9. What is the rhyme scheme used in the poem?
10. What is anastrophe?

Answers

1. Wild West Wind
2. Begins in pessimism, but ends with optimism
3. The winter of sufferings will give way to a spring of happiness.
4. Ode
5. Peterloo Massacre
6. "If winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"
7. Melancholic
8. Earth, sky, and sea
9. Terza Rima
10. Figure of speech in which normal word order is reversed

Assignments

1. Discuss the Symbolism used in the poem "Ode to the West Wind."
2. How does the poet identify himself with the West Wind?
3. If you have the superpowers of the West Wind, what changes would you bring about in society?
4. What are the literary devices employed in "Ode to the West Wind"?

5. Consider "Ode to the West Wind" as an Ode.

6. What romantic traits are present in "Ode to the West Wind"?

7. Discuss "Ode to the West Wind" as a poem of poetic creation.

8. Elaborate on the personification used in "Ode to the West Wind"?

Suggested Readings

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3. Fogle, Richard Harter. "The Imaginal Design of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". *ELH*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Sep. 1948), pp. 219–26.

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BLOCK – 02

British Poetry II

Unit 1
My Last Duchess

Robert Browning

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of Victorian literature
▶ contextualise Robert Browning as a representative poet of his era
▶ detail some of the prominent stylistic elements in "My Last Duchess"
▶ identify some of the major themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

The Victorian Age in English Literature takes its name, as you know, from Queen Victoria of Great Britain, who ascended the throne in 1837 and was monarch until her death in 1901.1830 marks the beginning of the Victorian period in English Literature. Robert Browning is considered a Victorian poet, as he wrote during this time period. Yet, Browning's work is simultaneously a revolt against some of the most well-defined aspects of that time, and a reflection of its characteristics. The most well-known feature of Victorian England was its 'prudish' attitudes on sex and Browning's work takes great issue with such repressions. The Victorian idea that women should prepare a nice home and facilitate social success for men is shown to be equally fallacious in poems like "My Last Duchess" and "The Laboratory". His works drew on the prevailing Victorian doubts about the national supremacy of England.

Browning wrote true-to-life poetry that reflected upon some of the darkest aspects of Victorian life. The poem in the unit, "My Last Duchess", is a well-known dramatic monologue. It suggests that the speaker has killed his previous wife and will soon do the same to the next unfortunate woman he marries. The poet's inspiration for this poem came from the Duke and Duchess of Ferarra. Married at fourteen, the Duchess passed away under very suspicious circumstances by the age of seventeen. Browning uses this event as the basis for a poem that dives deep into the mind of a powerful man who wishes to control his wife in every aspect of her life, including her feelings.

A similar historical instance can be found in Henry the VIIIth, and his many wives whom he accused of treason and executed when he grew tired of them. Indeed, during the time, wives were viewed as disposable. Their husbands would often accuse them of certain

crimes to do away with them and marry anew. The life of a Victorian wife was thus a perilous one. As with other poems of Browning, this one revolves around the darker side of Victorian life – the treatment of wives by their husbands. In effect, as we will soon glean from exploring the work in more detail, Browning was a man of his time, both in the way he reflected new Victorian learning and questioned some of its assumptions on morality and behaviour.

Keywords

Dramatic Monologue, Dark themes, Art, Power, Position of women

Discussion

2.1.1 Section 1

Lines 1-15

"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured counte-nance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps

"My Last Duchess" opens with the speaker asking an implied listener if he would please sit down and look at a portrait of his last Duchess. This makes the readers wonder why the lady in the portrait is currently not his Duchess. He does not reveal whether she is deceased or put away in a convent some-where. He asks his listener to sit and look at the life-sized painting of her. He reveals that this painting is behind a curtain and that no one, but he is allowed to draw the curtain to view the painting or to show it to anyone. The reader can immediately sense that the Duke is controlling. The question that remains unan-swered still is, why is this his last Duchess?

The Duke describes the look on the Duchess' face, commenting that she had a joyous look and an earnest glance. He notes that "twas not Her husband's presence only called that spot of joy into the Duchess' cheek". This is a cu-rious thing to say. Why would he expect that his presence alone, and nothing else, would bring joy to her face? He does not answer that question, but the fact that he notes this gives a little bit of insight into why he was the only one who was allowed to open the curtain.

All along, he wanted to be the only one who would bring a look of joy to his Duchess' face. Now that she was put away somewhere, and her life-size painting was on the wall, he could be the only one to ever see that look of joy on her face since he would allow no one else to look at the painting without his permission. Suddenly, our speaker begins to seem mental-ly disturbed.

2.1.2 Section 2

Lines 16-24

> Frà Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps
> Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
> Must never hope to reproduce the faint
> Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
> Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
> For calling up that spot of joy. She had
> A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
> Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
> She looked on, and her looks went every-where.

In this section of "My Last Duchess", the Duke seems to be reminiscing about his former Duchess and all that bothered him about her. She was too easily pleased by everyone around her, a quality that the Duke was not happy with. He didn't like that if someone like "Fra Pandolf" (we don't know much more about this character) were to tell her that her shawl covered her wrists too much, she would blush. The Duke also did not like her blushing at the flirtations of another man. He did not like the things which he called common courtesy would "call up that spot of joy" which she seemed to always have on her face. The Duke accuses her of having a heart that was "too soon made glad" and "too easily impressed". He was annoyed that she liked everything that she looked at. Steadily, the speaker's words paint the picture of a man who seems more and more psychotic and controlling. The implication seems to be that he put away his Duchess because he could not control her feelings. He wanted to be the only one to bring her joy and make her blush.

2.1.3 Section 3

Lines 25 -35

> Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
> The dropping of the daylight in the West,
> The bough of cherries some officious fool
> Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
> She rode with round the terrace—all and each
> Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
> Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
> Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
> My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
> With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
> This sort of trifling?

In these lines of "My Last Duchess", the Duke continues to explain all of the flaws in the Duchess' character. He says that she values her white mule, a branch of cherries, and sunset as much as she values a piece of jewellery that he had given her. He is irritated that she does not seem to see the value in what he gives to her; in fact, she seems to value the simple pleasures of life just as much as she values his expensive gifts to her. He also seems irritated that she does not seem to understand the importance of his place in life. By marrying her, he had given her a "nine-hundred-years-old name". This reveals that his family had been around for a very long time, and thus he gave her a well-known and prestigious name in marrying her. She did not seem to be any more thankful for this than she was thankful to watch the sunset. This irritated the Duke so much that he was not even willing to "stoop" to her level to discuss it with her. He thinks it would be "trifling" to do so.

2.1.4 Section 4

Lines 35-47

> Even had you skill
> In speech—(which I have not)—to make
> your will
> Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just
> this
> Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
> Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
> Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
> Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made ex-
> cuse,
> —E'en then would be some stooping; and
> I choose
> Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no
> doubt,
> Whene'er I passed her; but who passed
> without
> Much the same smile? This grew; I gave
> commands;
> Then all smiles stopped together. There she
> stands
> As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll
> meet

The Duke continues to explain that he chooses not to stoop to discuss with his Duchess what made him so disgusted with her. Yet, he seems quite comfortable discussing it with this listener. Perhaps he thought himself too high and mighty to stoop to talk to a woman, even if that woman was his wife. He admitted that she smiled at him pleasantly when he passed by, but it bothered him that everyone received that same smile from her. He explained that he "gave commands" and "then all smiles stopped together". This causes the reader to feel sorry for the Duchess, and rightly so.

She comes across as a lovely, happy, exuberant person. It seems that the Duke commanded her in such a way as to make her stop smiling altogether. He robbed her of her joy with his controlling attitude toward her. After explaining what happened when he commanded her, the Duke turns his attention back to the painting on the wall and says, "there she stands as if alive". This suggests that the real Duchess is no longer alive. The Duke seems happier with a painting of her because he can control who gets to look at the joy on her face. The Duke then invites his listener to return downstairs with him.

2.1.5 Section 5

Lines 47-56

> The company below then. I repeat,
> The Count your master's known munifi-
> cence
> Is ample warrant that no just pretence
> Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
> Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
> At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
> Together down, sir. Notice Neptune,
> though,
> Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
> Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze
> for me!

This section of "My Last Duchess" reveals the identity of the Duke's listener. He is the servant of a Count in the land, and they are trying to arrange a marriage between the Duke and the Count's daughter. The Duke says that his "fair daughter" is his "object". He brings the man back downstairs with him, and as they walk, he points out the bronze statue that was made especially for him.

The statue is of Neptune taming a sea horse. Neptune, of course, is the god of the sea. This symbolizes the Duke, and the sea horse symbolises any Duchess he would acquire. The Duke views himself as a god, and he wishes to tame his wife to do whatever he wishes her to do, including even to feel whatever he wish-

es her to feel. This clearly shows the level of derangement of the speaker. It seems that the speaker in "My Last Duchess" is an exploration of certain notions that were attached to domesticity and marriage in Browning's time.

2.1.6 Critical Appreciation

Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power. In the poem, "My Last Duchess", Robert Browning probes the theme of power and entitlement to reveal how the main character cared about his name and fame, wanting things to be done absolutely in his terms and sometimes even abusing authority. In the poem "My Last Duchess", power and authority can be seen to be symbolised through the character of the Duke. The Duke talks about the painting of the duchess hanging on the wall from the beginning of the poem. He is responsible for her being nothing more than a painting.

Another example that reflects power and authority can be seen through the attitude of the duke towards the painter. He is talking about the painting of the duchess on the wall, but not crediting the painter for his work. He also talks about how he is the only person now, who has control over the curtain that the painting is hung beside to. The Duke confronts a crisis of manhood in that the Duchess challenges both the construction of manliness as well as the Duke's use of such manliness to justify his social position.

The degree of power and entitlement possessed by the Duke can be seen in his pride that he now has control over duchess's smile.

He had an objection over her smiling to strangers as if she did not value his nine hundred years' old name. The Duchess had incurred his displeasure by her expansive friendliness and her refusal to acknowledge his superiority in all things. Now, the smile of the duchess has forever been silenced and the Duke is happy with the fact. In fact, he mentions that all it took was a simple command and she had been silenced. Browning manages to create horror in the reader at the Duke's sociopathy. It is only at this point that the identity of the listener as the servant of a Count in the land becomes clear. A union between the Duke and the Count's daughter is being considered. This shows the complete dominance that the Duke had over those around him.

Another example of power and entitlement can be seen when the Duke talks about the other artworks that he owns. He speaks about a sculpture of Neptune taming a sea-horse, admiring his collections and depicting himself as a lover of the arts. He is, in reality, portraying the Duchess and women in general, as objects who can be controlled by the strength of his will. There is no surety that the Duke is conscious of his implications: given his excessive pride, his refusal to ever stoop, he could hardly tolerate allowing another to believe that his Duchess was unfaithful to him, especially through his own revelation, however subtle. Within the poem "My Last Duchess", Robert Browning excellently explored the theme of power and entitlement through the attitude of the Duke towards the Duchess. The Duke, having excessive pride, abuses his power and authority to carry out tasks that are immoral.

Recap

- ► Dramatic Monologue in 56 lines
- ► The Duke displays the painting of his last duchess to the implied listener
- ► Fra Pandolf is the painter
- ► Painting displayed to outsiders only with the Duke's permission
- ► Suspicious comments about the Duchess
- ► Duke suggests that his presence is not the only thing that made her smile
- ► Controlling nature of the Duke revealed through comments
- ► Her easy-to-please nature and friendly disposition annoys the Duke
- ► She is equally pleased by the Duke's attention as by the beauty of nature
- ► She is as impressed by an ordinary gift as she is by his wealth and position
- ► Duchess's behaviour constantly scrutinised
- ► Duke found it demeaning to have a conversation with the Duchess about his complaints
- ► His commands ended her smile – implying that harm had come to her
- ► Implied listener is a servant of a Count
- ► Arrange marriage between Duke and Count's daughter
- ► Portrayal and position of women in The Victorian Age

Objective Questions

1. Which poetic form is followed in "My Last Duchess"?
2. Who is the speaker of the poem?
3. Whose portrait is hidden behind the curtains?
4. Why does the 'spot of joy' on the Duchess's face annoy the Duke?
5. What does the Duke observe about the Duchess's heart (or her nature)?
6. What does the Duke mean by his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name"?
7. What does the Duke consider to be 'stooping'?
8. Why did "all the smiles" stop?
9. What is the identity of the unseen listener?
10. Whom does the Duke seek to marry next?
11. What artwork does the Duke point out towards the end?
12. Who cast the sculpture of Neptune?
13. Which aspect of the poem reveals the Duke's true nature?

Answers

1. Dramatic Monologue
2. The Duke
3. The portrait of the last Duchess
4. Because he is not the reason for her joy
5. That it is too easily made glad or impressed
6. The chance to share his wealth and position
7. Having a conversation with the Duchess about his complaints and expectations
8. Because of the Duke's commands
9. The Count's servant
10. The Count's daughter
11. The sculpture of Neptune taming the sea-horse
12. Claus of Innsbruck
13. His comments about the Duchess

Assignments

1. Discuss "My Last Duchess" as a Dramatic Monologue.
2. Can "My Last Duchess" be considered as a psychological study? Support your opinion with examples from the poem.
3. How does the poem suggest or imply that the Duke might have harmed the Duchess in some way?
4. What can we infer about the Duchess's nature from the comments made by the Duke?
5. Write a critical appreciation of the poem "My Last Duchess".
6. Explore the major underlying themes of the poem "My Last Duchess."

Suggested Readings

1. Abou-Bakr, Randa. "Robert Browning's "Dramatic Lyrics": Contribustion to a Genre." *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 21 (2001): 113-140.

2. Bloom, Harold, ed.. *Modern Critical Views: Robert Browning*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985.

3. Browning, Robert, and James Mason. *My Last Duchess and Other Poems*. Caedmon, 1968.

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Unit 2
Journey of the Magi

T.S. Eliot

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of Modernist literature

▶ contextualise T.S. Eliot as a representative poet of his era

▶ detail some of the stylistic elements in the selected poem

▶ identify some of the central themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

The first fifty years of the twentieth century saw the emergence of several major poets in Great Britain, whose contributions to British poetry were of immense value. One of them was Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), an American, who made England his home and left behind him a wealth of literary works in prose, poetry, and drama. He was a Modernist poet who came under the sway of contemporary European trends of art and literature. His literary works show the influence of the French imagist and symbolist poets. The efforts he made in introducing ongoing European literary movements in English poetry are second to none.

Though differing opinions have been expressed about his relative merit as a poet of international repute, it is best to regard him as a figure who contributed to the enrichment of English Literature. He successfully worked for the revival of the poetic drama, which was virtually a dead literary form in Ireland and England. He inspired a young generation of English poets who appeared on the English literary scene following the years of First World War (1914-1918). In this section we shall go through T. S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" and discuss the main features of his poetic art displayed in this poem.

Keywords

Dramatic monologue, Biblical narratives, Religious transformation, Doubt, Journey

Discussion

2.2.1 Stanza One

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
(…)
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

In the first stanza, the speaker, who is one of the traveling Magi [wise men], starts the poem by giving a broad overview of the journey he and the other Magi embarked on. It was not a pleasant trip. They had a "cold coming…of it." The men were forced to deal with terrible weather that made everything harder. The speaker reflects on the days of travel as having occurred in the "worst time of the year / For a journey." Due to the fact that they could not choose when they travelled, they had to face these conditions.

The next two lines expand the details of their journey and the troubles they had to face along the way.

"The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter."

The men were not the only ones who suffered at this time, their camels, which were made to walk through the landscape bearing the men and their supplies were "galled, sore-footed, refractory." They eventually ended up "Lying down in the melting snow."
It is interesting that the poet chose to begin this piece, which is about the birth of Christ, in such a way. It does away with the image of majestic beings riding in to visit the child; instead, they are painted as deeply human. They suffered just as anyone would traversing the countryside. The speaker even states at one point that "There were times we regretted," or missed, "The summer palaces…the terraces… And the silken girls bringing sherbet." These were all elements of their home which were familiar to them and without which they were made to travel.

The following lines, which are crafted in an ever-worsening list, describe a litany of problems the men faced. There were the "camel men" who were often "cursing and grumbling." At points, they even ran away from the camps seeking out "liquor and women." The campsites were often cold as the fires went out, and there were no "shelters" to keep the men and animals dry.

In addition to these troubles with nature, they faced "hostile" cities and "unfriendly" towns that were unwilling to help them. The men had a "hard time…of it." By the time they got to the end of their journey, they had learned to prefer traveling at night. This way they could avoid the worst that the landscape, and the cities it held, had to offer.

There were even times, on the way to meet the son of God, that they said "this was all folly."

2.2.2 Stanza Two

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
(…)
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.

In the second stanza, a few changes come over the party of travelers. The speaker describes a "dawn" in which they "came down to a temperate valley." This is a landscape that is quite unfamiliar to them as they had spent so much time traveling through such terrible conditions. The valley is "below the snow line" and it smells "of vegetation." It is clear from these first lines that they have come to a much better place.

There is running water and a "water-mill beating" in the dark. Eventually, the men make their way to a "tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel." They inquired at this tavern, looking for information about Christ and they received none. The men continue to travel and "arrive at evening." It was the speaker states, not a moment too soon. Everyone was close to their final breaking point having faced hunger, terribly cold weather, shelterless nights, and inhospitable towns. One might expect the speaker to revel in his arrival to the manger where Christ was born, this is not the case.

He says that the pace they finally came to was "satisfactory," nothing more. This could be a reference more to the physicality of the place rather than the momentous nature of the occasion, but either way, it is a strikingly drab and depressing way to describe the moment.

2.2.3 Stanza Three

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
(…)
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

In the third stanza, the speaker halts his description of the journey and moves on to describe how he feels about the entire experience now. It is clear he has terrible memories of the trip, but what of the manager itself?

He begins by saying it was "a long time ago" but that he would "do it again." It was, at least in his mind, a journey worth undertaking. It is at this point in the poem the speaker directs a question to his listener to whom he is telling the story. He asks, "..were we led all that way for Birth or Death?"

He knows that there "certainly" was a "Birth." This is the case as there was "evidence and no doubt," but what of the death? In the next lines, he equates birth and death. This particular birth was so painful to the Magi and their companions that it was "like Death, our death."

After the trip was over they "returned to [their] places, these Kingdoms." When they arrived there and attempted to settle back into the lives they once knew and loved, they were "no longer at ease." Everything had changed for them. The men did not feel comfortable in this world in which "alien people [were] clutching their gods," when they had seen the true God.

The poem concludes with the speaker stating that he would be glad to die another death. Perhaps this one could bring him to his final rest alongside God.

2.2.4 Critical Appreciation

The poem "Journey of the Magi" is based on the theme of the Bible. It is full of religious feelings. The visit of the Three Wise Men of East to Palestine at the time of Christ's birth has been described in a very realistic way. The wise men started their journey in the extreme cold of the winter to reach the place of Christ's birth to offer presents to him.

The poet wants to emphasise that the birth and death of Christ were different from those of

the common people. His birth was hard and bitter agony for the human race, like death. He was crucified for the redemption of humanity from sins and bondages. The description of three trees on the low sky symbolises the future Crucifixion of Christ because he was crucified near the three trees. The poet takes a sense of relief and appreciates the quality of Christ and his extraordinary death. The language of the poem is very measured. The poet has achieved grand success as an artist. The poem is very symbolic and full of religious touch.

"Journey of the Magi" is an allegory of the spiritual journey in which the flesh still craves for sensual enjoyment. The details of the journey of the three wise men from the east bound for Jerusalem to honor the newborn Jesus are the "objective correlatives" of the spiritual experiences of the journey from the kingdom of the world to the kingdom of heaven, which entails the death of the old physical self and the birth of a new spiritual one. It is a long hazardous journey in "the worst time of the year" in the "very dead of winter", when the body needs protection and seeks sensual pleasure.

The Magi are a composite symbol of the spiritual quest. While one of them reminisces the journey undertaken by them, he longingly recollects their indulgence in sensual pleasure. He says that while they were going to Emmaus, they felt drawn to the fleshly enjoyments, the lack of which tortured them and in such a moment of spiritual crisis, they regretted to have obeyed the call of the spirit.

However, the quester survives the long journey in the night and at dawn he is in a "temperate valley" where everything is pleasant. It is the dawn of spiritual exhilaration; the different aspects of nature signify the new images of life; the "running stream" symbolises the

rhythmic flow of life; the "water-mill beating the darkness" suggests the doubt being driven away; the galloping away of "the white horse" in the meadow symbolises upward movement of the spirit. At this stage the quester becomes conscious of the betrayal of the man of belief at the hands of those who are without any belief. In this kingdom of spirit, he visualises the three crosses on Calvary, one of Christ and the other two of the two "male factors." He also has the vision of Christ riding a white horse and of Judas betraying Christ for thirty pieces of silver, and the Roman dicing for the robes of Christ after the Crucifixion. These memories of the misdeeds of men without belief engage his mind for a while and he realises that the secret of his quest is not revealed to him as yet and so he continues his exploration. At the end of the day he finds himself in a place from where he looks back to the region he has traversed and feels satisfied with the advance he has made.

The positive gain of the journey is the affirmation of the belief that for the spiritual rejuvenation the overcoming of the sensual aspect of life is essential. "Journey of the Magi" is inspired by the story in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. One of the Magi recounts the arduous journey they undertook to witness the Birth which was 'hard and bitter agony' for them. The journey is beset with the same kinds of temptations as are hinted at in "Ash Wednesday", and similar regrets for the summer palaces or slopes, the terraces, and the silken girls bringing sherbet. The New Birth does not bring unalloyed joy because the transition from the old to the new is accompanied by pain. It is a kind of experience referred to by Jung in his Psychological Types: "The birth of the deliverer is equivalent to a great catastrophe since a new and powerful life issues forth just when no life or force or new development was anticipated".

Recap

- ▶ Modernist, allegorical poem
- ▶ Dramatic Monologue form
- ▶ Speaker is one of the Magi or Wise Men who travelled to meet the Baby Christ
- ▶ I Stanza describes hardships of the voyage
- ▶ Humanises the myth of the Magi
- ▶ Away from the comforts of the home
- ▶ Felt the journey might be a mistake or a folly
- ▶ II Stanza revolves around their arrival in a temperate valley – symbolising new life
- ▶ Image of three trees, hands dicing for pieces of silver, white horse – symbolising crucifixion, Judas's betrayal, and the coming of Christ
- ▶ They arrive at a tavern, seeking information about Christ and receiving none
- ▶ The arrival at the holy manger is anti-climactic, described as 'satisfactory'
- ▶ III Stanza conveys the speaker's thoughts on the experience
- ▶ The experience has been meaningful but harsh
- ▶ Witnessed the birth of Christ, and the death of the old religion
- ▶ Upon return, the travellers found their homes and ways to be "alien"
- ▶ The experience changed them entirely
- ▶ Speaker wishes for "another death" – suggesting the end of his own life
- ▶ Biblical themes, Paradox of life and death
- ▶ The journey as well as the birth of Christ is not a moment of celebration – presented as an event that seemed like a death
- ▶ The quest completely transforms the travellers

Objective Questions

1. Why was it the "worst time of the year" to go on a long journey?
2. What happened to the camels during the journey?
3. What memory makes the Magi regret their journey?
4. What makes the Magi feel that the journey was a folly?
5. Who runs away in search of liquor and women?
6. Why did the Magi come to prefer travelling by night?
7. Where do the travellers arrive in the dawn?
8. What sight do the Magi see in the low sky?
9. What does the image of "six hands dicing for pieces of silver" symbolise?

10. Why does the speaker say they found the place "not a moment too soon"?
11. Why does the birth seem like a "Hard and bitter agony" to the travellers?
12. What does the speaker mean by "another death"?

Answers

1. Cold weather and steep ways
2. They lay down in the melting snow
3. The memory of the comforts they left behind
4. The hardships that they faced
5. The camel-men
6. To avoid the harsh weather and people
7. At a temperate valley
8. Three trees
9. Judas's betrayal
10. They were desperate to find the place after such an arduous journey
11. They are no longer comfortable in their own home and old ways
12. The end of his own life

Assignments

1. What examples does the speaker offer in the first stanza to suggest that they had a "hard time"?
2. Which aspects of their old life do the Magi regret during their journey?
3. Describe the images that the speaker sees in the temperate valley.
4. Comment on the biblical imagery that the Magi witness during their journey.
5. How does the poem "Journey of the Magi" break with traditional Christian themes?
6. Explain the allegory of the quest in the "Journey of the Magi".
7. What literary form is used in "Journey of the Magi"?
8. Write a short note on the impact of ambiguity in the representation of reality and truth in the poem "Journey of the Magi".
9. Comment on the symbols in the poem "Journey of the Magi'.

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Suggested Readings

1. Smith, Grover. T.S. *Eliot's Poetry and Plays: A Study in Sources and Meaning.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.
2. Southam, B. C. *A Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot.* Harvest Books, 1996.
3. Williamson, George. *A Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot: A Poem-By-Poem Analysis.* Syracuse UP, 1998.

Unit 3
A Prayer for My Daughter
W.B. Yeats

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of Modernist literature
▶ contextualise W.B. Yeats as a representative poet of his era
▶ detail some of the predominant stylistic elements in the selected text
▶ identify some of the themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

"A Prayer for My Daughter" exposes the typical modernist sentiment of the poet. The poet has portrayed a way of life and would like his daughter to adopt it. The kind of philosophy, he formulates in the poem, is oriented towards an emphasis on the importance of tradition, custom and culture in the modern world which is dominated by chaos. The tradition, custom, culture stand certainly for aristocracy.

He is of the opinion that aristocracy is the only culture which can redeem the modern world of chaos and anarchy. For him, aristocracy is the source of aesthetic, intellectual and cultural beauty. Therefore, probably because of Nietzsche's influence upon him, he expresses his bias against commoners and wishes his daughter to be trained in the school of aristocracy. He considers it an ideal way of life. The poem presents this as a well-reasoned ideal, drawing not only on mythology and history, but also on his own experience. The poet advocates an essentially non-Christian order, the keynote of which is a man's sense of his own nobility and self-sufficiency. The poet has left sentiments and pathos behind and has cultivated an almost tragic outlook. He now combines the appreciation of beauty with a sense of the tragic rather than a pathetic element of life. He may now impart meaning to the ordinary events of life which his earlier poetry did not attempt. In the process, his poetry becomes a vehicle of public speech.

Keywords

Paternal love, Class values, Ideal womanhood, Irish politics, Spirituality

Discussion

2.3.1 Stanza One

> Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
> Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
> My child sleeps on. There is no obstacle
> But Gregory's wood and one bare hill
> Whereby the haystack- and roof-levelling wind,
> Bred on the Atlantic, can be stayed;
> And for an hour I have walked and prayed
> Because of the great gloom that is in my mind.

The poem "A Prayer for My Daughter" opens with the image of the child sleeping in a cradle half hidden by its hood. The child sleeps innocently amidst the "howling storm" outside, but Yeats couldn't settle down due to the storm inside. The storm howling symbolises destruction mentioned by the poet in his "The Second Coming". The wind bred in the Atlantic has no obstacles except the estate of Lady Gregory, referring to the poet's patroness, and a bare hill. The direct impact of the wind, meaning the force of the outside world, especially on his daughter, worries the poet. Because of this great gloom he walked and prayed for his daughter to be protected from the physical storm outside and the political storm brewing across Ireland.

2.3.2 Stanza Two

> I have walked and prayed for this young child an hour
> And heard the sea-wind scream upon the tower,
> And under the arches of the bridge, and scream
> In the elms above the flooded stream;
> Imagining in excited reverie
> That the future years had come,
> Dancing to a frenzied drum,
> Out of the murderous innocence of the sea.

In the second stanza of "A Prayer for My Daughter", Yeats' worries about the future are further explained. He hears the sea screaming upon the tower, under the bridge, and elms above the flooded stream. The onomatopoeia word "Scream" and the "flooded stream" symbolise the poet's overwhelming anxiety for his daughter. Also, it refers to the great flood in the Bible. Due to his haunting fear, he imagines the future coming out of the sea and dances to the frenzied drum, referring to war and bloodshed. In the last line, the poet employs the paradox "murderous innocence" to contrast the world and his daughter, which also recalls the images of "blood-dimmed tide" in "The Second Coming".

2.3.3 Stanza Three

> May she be granted beauty and yet not
> Beauty to make a stranger's eye distraught,
> Or hers before a looking-glass, for such,
> Being made beautiful overmuch,
> Consider beauty a sufficient end,
> Lose natural kindness and maybe
> The heart-revealing intimacy
> That chooses right, and never find a friend.

In the third stanza of "A Prayer for My Daughter", Yeats prays for his daughter to be gifted with beauty. At the same time, he doesn't want her beauty to distract or to leave her dependent on her beauty for everything. Further, he doesn't want her to become proud or vain that she spends all day staring at the mirror and fails to have natural companionships. The poet implies that too much beauty is a dangerous one and that he only wants her to be beautiful enough to secure a husband.

2.3.4 Stanza Four

> Helen being chosen found life flat and dull
> And later had much trouble from a fool,
> While that great Queen, that rose out of the

spray,
Being fatherless could have her way
Yet chose a bandy-leggèd smith for man.
It's certain that fine women eat
A crazy salad with their meat
Whereby the Horn of Plenty is undone.

In stanza four of "A Prayer for My Daughter", Yeats substantiates his view on how excessive beauty has always been a source of trouble and destruction. He turns to Helen in Greek mythology, considered to be the most beautiful woman on earth, brought the doom upon her, and many others. The image of Helen evokes another figure Aphrodite, who rose out of the spray. The union of Aphrodite with Hephaestus bandy-legged Smith brings to mind the Maud Gonne-MacBride episode. It makes the poet wonder if the beautiful women eat something stupid for salad, that they make a stupid decision which brings misery forever. The rich "Horn of Plenty" is suggestive of courtesy, aristocracy, and ceremony, that is lost by those women who make stupid decisions.

2.3.5 Stanza Five

In courtesy I'd have her chiefly learned;
Hearts are not had as a gift but hearts are earned
By those that are not entirely beautiful;
Yet many, that have played the fool
For beauty's very self, has charm made wise,
And many a poor man that has roved,
Loved and thought himself beloved,
From a glad kindness cannot take his eyes.

In stanza five of "A Prayer for My Daughter", the poet continues with what he wants his daughter to possess more than mere beauty. He wants his daughter to learn to be compassionate and kind. Many times, men who believed to love and loved by the beautiful women faced disappointment compared to those found love in the modest yet compassionate women. Moreover, he says modest and courteous people attract hearts than those with beauty, referring to his own marriage. Ultimately, he makes it clear that he wants his daughter to be an agreeable young woman than an arrogant beauty.

2.3.6 Stanza Six

May she become a flourishing hidden tree
That all her thoughts may like the linnet be,
And have no business but dispensing round
Their magnanimities of sound,
Nor but in merriment begin a chase,
Nor but in merriment a quarrel.
O may she live like some green laurel
Rooted in one dear perpetual place.

In stanza six of "A Prayer for My Daughter", Yeats continues to talk about his hopes and expectations for his daughter. As she grew up, he wants her to be happy and content. He wants her to become "a flourishing hidden tree" and her thoughts like a "linnet" referring to its innocence and cheerfulness. Like a linnet, he wants her to be satisfied with herself, and infect others with her happiness. Further, he wants her to live like a "laurel" rooted in a particular place. The poet reveals his wish for his daughter to be rooted in the tradition.

2.3.7 Stanza Seven

My mind, because the minds that I have loved,
The sort of beauty that I have approved,
Prosper but little, has dried up of late,
Yet knows that to be choked with hate
May well be of all evil chances chief.
If there's no hatred in a mind
Assault and battery of the wind
Can never tear the linnet from the leaf.

Yeats continues to talk about self-contented women in stanza seven of "A Prayer for My

Daughter". He believes that kind, self-contained, traditionally rooted women are incorruptible. The poet considers hatred to be the cause of all evil and prays that she be left off that evil. Further, he believes that a soul free from hatred will preserve its innocence and hatred. Just as the storm outside can't tear leaves from sturdy trees, turmoil and war can't break a strong woman.

2.3.8 Stanza Eight

An intellectual hatred is the worst,
So let her think opinions are accursed.
Have I not seen the loveliest woman born?
Out of the mouth of Plenty's horn,
Because of her opinionated mind
Barter that horn and every good
By quiet natures understood
For an old bellows full of angry wind?

In stanza eight of "A Prayer for my Daughter", the poet implores his daughter to shun passion and wild feelings that he considered as the weakness of beautiful women. She must be temperate because people who love deeply, could hate deeply too. Hate destroys people and makes them do cruel things, especially intellectual hatred which is the worst of all kinds. The poet reflects upon his emotional state when Maud Gonne rejected him to marry John MacBride. He wants his daughter to experience neither disappointment nor hatred.

2.3.9 Stanza Nine

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

The ninth stanza continues to describe the impact of hatred and the benefit of staying away from hatred. Once hatred is driven out, the soul could recover its innocence. Then the soul would be free to explore and find that it is "self-delighting", "self-appeasing" and "self-affrighting". According to the poet, the ideal woman makes everyone happy and comfortable, despite all storms of misfortunes that come in her way. She is a stronghold for people around her and her will would be that of heavens, for she has a clear mind.

2.3.10 Stanza Ten

And may her bridegroom bring her to a house
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious;
For arrogance and hatred are the wares
Peddled in the thoroughfares.
How but in custom and in ceremony
Are innocence and beauty born?
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
And custom for the spreading laurel tree.

In the last stanza of "A Prayer for my Daughter", the poet expresses his final wish. He prays that his daughter to be married to a good husband who takes her to a home with aristocratic values and traditions. There, he believes, neither arrogance nor hatred of common folks could be found, but morality and purity. Further, the poet does not want her to live a decadent life. He concludes by stating that his daughter would be rooted in spiritual values like a 'laurel tree'.

2.3.11 Analysis

In the poem, a speaker (usually read as Yeats himself) prays about the type of woman he hopes his daughter will become and the kind of life he hopes she will have. At its core, the poem expresses a father's heartfelt wishes for his newborn daughter. In a larger sense, "A

Prayer for My Daughter" is a rich, complex reflection on the joys and struggles of parenthood, Irish politics, and Yeats's own past.

W. B. Yeats in his ten-stanza poem, "A Prayer for my Daughter" questions how best to raise his daughter. Though by 1919, the war was over, in Ireland it yet turned normal. So, he ponders how she will survive the difficult times ahead, in the politically turbulent times. The poem not only expresses the helplessness of Yeats as a father, but of all fathers who had to walk through this situation. He wants to give his daughter a life of beauty and innocence, safety, and security. He further wants her to be well-mannered and full of humility, free from intellectual hatred and from being strongly opinionated. Finally, he wants her to get married into an aristocratic family which is rooted in spirituality and traditional values.

In a nutshell, "A Prayer for My Daughter" is a reflection of poet's love for his daughter, and wonderfully portrays a father's concern for his daughter which becomes a universal emblem of paternal love. The poet concerns how she will survive against the violence and anarchy of the modern world. That's why Yeats prays for his daughter that she must embody some noble qualities that will assist her to encounter the harsh reality and future uncertainty with grave confidence and ultimate independence. Avoiding the hatred and arrogance, she can cultivate good virtues following the traditions and customs, and being open-minded she can win the love of others rather than having a ravishing beauty. In a word, Yeats urges for the restoration of grace and order in a battered civilization under an established culture and tradition.

Recap

▶ Poem reveals speaker's love and expectations for infant daughter

▶ Paternal love and class value as theme

▶ 10 stanzas

▶ 1st stanza sees speaker viewing daughter in cradle amidst a great storm

▶ Protection against the political storm in Ireland

▶ Fear for his daughter in the hostile world and unpredictable future

▶ Beauty as a dangerous gift

▶ Mythological examples of Helen and Aphrodite – women losing the "horn of plenty"

▶ Wants his daughter to develop ideal qualities

▶ Become a kind young woman than arrogant beauty

▶ Achieve self-satisfaction but provide joy to others – rooted in tradition

▶ Incorruptibility of traditional, ideal women

▶ Shun passion and wild feelings

▶ Stay away from hatred and other misfortunes

▶ Good aristocratic marriage – keep away from baser feelings of common people

▶ Spiritual foundation for life

Objective Questions

1. What stands between the child and the howling storm?
2. Why does the speaker pray for his daughter?
3. What does the speaker fear that his daughter's beauty might do to a stranger?
4. Which mythological examples does the speaker point out to support his arguments about beauty?
5. What do beautiful women eat, according to the speaker, to undo the 'Horn of Plenty'?
6. What would the speaker like his daughter to learn about 'hearts'?
7. What must the daughter aspire to be like?
8. Which kind of hatred does the speaker consider to be the worst?
9. Where does the speaker wish his daughter would marry into?
10. What ideal qualities does the speaker associate with noble, aristocratic families?

Answers

1. Lady Gregory's woods and a bare hill
2. Because of the great gloom in his mind
3. Cause distress/make them distraught
4. Helen of Sparta and Aphrodite
5. A crazy salad
6. That hearts are earned, not received as a gift
7. A Linnet
8. Intellectual hatred
9. An accustomed and ceremonious house/ aristocratic family
10. Innocence and beauty

Assignments

1. What does the poet value most for his daughter in "A Prayer for My Daughter"?
2. What are the different wishes and dreams that the speaker harbours for his daughter in "A Prayer for My Daughter"?
3. How does the poem reveal a father's concern for his daughter?
4. In the poem "A prayer for my daughter" nature serves in both its aspects – wild and joyous." Explain.
5. Write a critical appreciation of the poem, "A Prayer For My Daughter".

Suggested Readings

1. Arkins, Brian. *The Thought of W.B. Yeats*. Peter Lang, 2010.
2. Bloom, Harold. *Yeats*. Oxford UP, 1970.

Unit 4
The Thought-Fox

Ted Hughes

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of late twentieth century literature
▶ contextualise Ted Hughes as a representative poet of his era
▶ detail some of the predominant stylistic elements in the selected text
▶ identify some of the important themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

Ted Hughes is acknowledged as one of the most original and powerful English poets of the post-Second World War period. This does not mean that his poetic gifts and viewpoints were never disputed. He had both his admirers and detractors, and when in 1984, he was named Poet Laureate, he received fresh lots of bouquets and brickbats.

Born in 1930, Hughes has been a writer of versatile genius. Apart from nearly a dozen books of poetry for adult readers, he has published a large body of writings for children. His poetry has maintained an ongoing dialogue with history, literary, socio-political, religious and intellectual arenas. The great sweep of his imagination has taken in the most significant issues of life in the contemporary world, ravaged by a series of dirty and great wars, unprecedented bloodbath, carnage, intense psychical conflicts and horrors.

Ted Hughes is one of the most influential English poets of the twentieth century. While at Cambridge University he met and later married the American scholar and poet Sylvia Plath. For many years after Plath's suicide Hughes remained virtually silent about her, despite accusations that he had contributed to his wife's tragic death. Shortly, before he died Hughes published *Birthday Letters*, a collection of poems about his relationship with Plath.

Earlier in his career, Hughes wrote nature poetry, but his poems about his native Yorkshire landscape and its animals were very different from the pastoral conventions of English poetry; charged with the intensity of the mythic, his work was rawer, darker and more violent. Drawing on Anglo-Saxon literary heritage, the language Hughes used often has a rough-hewn physicality that gives his verse a monumental quality.

Keywords

Discussion

> "I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
> Something else is alive
> Beside the clock's loneliness
> And this blank page where my fingers move.
>
> Through the window I see no star:
> Something more near
> Though deeper within darkness
> Is entering the loneliness:
>
> Cold, delicately as the dark snow
> A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
> Two eyes serve a movement, that now
> And again now, and now, and now
>
> Sets neat prints into the snow
> Between trees, and warily a lame
> Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
> Of a body that is bold to come
>
> Across clearings, an eye,
> A widening deepening greenness,
> Brilliantly, concentratedly,
> Coming about its own business
>
> Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
> It enters the dark hole of the head.
> The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
> The page is printed."

"The Thought-Fox" starts on a silent, clear night where the poet, sitting alone at his desk, is attempting to write. But he has no luck with it. While struggling with his own creative process, he senses a second presence - "something more near / though deeper within darkness / is entering the loneliness". Here, the night symbolises the depths of imagination, evoking the idea of dormant genius, and the muse/inspira-tion. The poet is alone at night, labouring over his poem, when he feels the slow awakening of an idea – perhaps a thought about how he might develop his poem or an image that leads him to a poetic line.

The oncoming idea itself is symbolised by the fox's presence. At first, it is not clear what the idea is, to the poet. This is depicted in the fragmented nature of the image: "a fox's nose touches twig, leaf;". There is only a very basic and limited view of an idea at this point. "The fox is shrouded in darkness; only the pinnacle of it can be seen by the watchful poet, and like-wise, the muse visits but only leaves him with a fragment of an image to build into a poem." The fox is a half-hidden and elusive figure throughout much of the entire poem, serving as a metaphor for the poetic idea which like-wise remains half-hidden to the poet.

It is possible to see Hughes's attempts to mythicize or create a mythical aura through his use of language. He employs images such as the 'dark snow', the 'eye / a widening deep-ening greenness'. There is almost a cinematic quality of imagery – the reader can very easily 'view' the quiet night, the poet, and the fox as separate 'shots' or images. By doing so, the writer is able to provide concrete imagery for an abstract and often misunderstood creative process. Further, it also evokes the idea of the playful muse, sneaking in, and sneaking out of the poet's mind.

The moment of revelation when the fox/idea arrives out of formlessness is thus made clear: "a sudden sharp hot stink of fox". The poet appears to have reached the heights of poet-ic reflection, and has managed to write down the poem that has been forming within him

throughout the night. The sudden visibility of the fox is paralleled by the committing of the poetic idea to the page – "The poem and the fox exist as one entity".

The very pattern of the poem itself invites attention. Ted Hughes writes with a pace that heightens the reader's anticipation. At the beginning of the poem, only the fox's nose is seen, followed by a slow reveal of its eyes. The broken punctuation and syntax show the gradual, hesitant manner in which the fox/idea comes about. The movement of the poem is from the abstract to the concrete. The image of the fox is elusive, then quickened, and finally solidly visible. The poem comes a full circle with its final lines, leading back to the beginning stage; "the window is starless still; the clock ticks; / The page is printed."

2.4.1 Critical Appreciation

The poem "The Thought-Fox" is about writing a poem, and it explains the nature of literary inspiration and creation. The poem's action takes place at midnight, when the poet is alone at his desk, with only the ticking of the clock for company. The image conjured up is one of silence and solitude, with the poet cut off from the rest of the world, waiting to be transported by his literary imagination. The poet's imagination is depicted as if creeping silently upon the poet, evoking a sense of stealth.

"The Thought-Fox" by Ted Hughes embodies the solitude that surrounds a work of art. The final line of the poem carries an air of fatalism and wistfulness. "The Thought-Fox" has frequently been hailed as the most fully realised and artistically satisfying poem in Ted Hughes's first collection, *The Hawk in the Rain*. Simultaneously, it is one of Hughes's most frequently anthologised poems. It is a poem about the process of writing poetry.

Hughes's 'fox', it must be noted, possesses none of the animal's freedom. It is incapable of rising from the page and walking away to nuzzle its young cubs or engaging in foxy behaviour behind the poet's back. It is incapable of dying in its own mortal, animal manner. For it is the poet's creature, wholly owned and possessed by him, fashioned in order to proclaim not its own reality but that of its creator.

Hughes' poetry is permeated by the conflict of sensibility that Hughes unintentionally dramatises in "The Thought-Fox." On the one hand, his work demonstrates an extraordinary sensuous and sensual generosity that coexists with an uncommon sense of abundance and a capacity for tenderness in contemporary poetry. These characteristics are particularly evident in several of his most mysteriously powerful poems–poems such as 'Crow's undersong,' 'Littleblood,' 'Full moon and little Frieda,' and 'Bride and groom lie hidden for three days.' On the other hand, his poetry–particularly his poetry in *Crow*–is infamous for the ferocity of its violence, a violence that has been viewed as destructive of all artistic and human values by some critics. Hughes appears to regard his own poetic sensitivity as 'feminine,' and his poetry frequently conveys the impression that he can indulge this sensitivity only within a protective shell of hard, steely 'masculine' violence.

This conflict of sensibility appears in such a diminished or suppressed form in "The Thought-Fox" that it is far from the poem's most striking feature. It is most evident in the tension between the extraordinary sensuous delicacy of the image Hughes uses to describe the fox's nose and the predatory impulse that appears to underpin the poem – an impulse Hughes has repeatedly compared the act of poetic creation to the process of capturing or killing small animals. Indeed, one could ar-

gue that the poem's final stanza records what amounts to a ritual of tough 'manly' posturing. For in it, the poet may be seen as engaging in an imaginative game in which he attempts to outstare the fox by staring directly into its eyes and refusing to move, flinch, or show any sign of 'feminine' weakness.

The fox, on the other hand, does not flinch or deviate from its path. It is almost as if it has successfully completed an initiation ritual to which the poet unconsciously subjected it; the fox, initially nervous, circumspect, and as soft and delicate as the dark snow, has demonstrated that it is not 'feminine' at all, but tough, manly, and steely willed 'brilliantly, concentratedly, going about its own business'. Perhaps it is only under these conditions that the poet can accept its sensuality without anxiety.

Recap

- ▶ Poem about the creative process
- ▶ Animal imagery as metaphor
- ▶ Speaker/Poet sitting at his desk, struggling to write a poem
- ▶ Feels a presence in the dark
- ▶ The image of a fox's nose and eyes gradually becomes clear
- ▶ It sets neat prints into the snow
- ▶ Comes closer, the body is almost visible now
- ▶ Speaker comprehends the image of the fox
- ▶ The visualisation of the image parallels poetry writing
- ▶ Poem about the role of imagination and creativity in writing
- ▶ Metapoetry – poem about poetry

Objective Questions

1. What is the speaker doing in the beginning of the poem?
2. Which images in the opening stanzas of the poem reveal that it is night time?
3. What does the fox's nose do as it appears?
4. Why does it appear that the fox is hesitant to appear?
5. What does the "widening" and "deepening" of the eye signify?
6. What olfactory image/image of smell makes it clear that the fox is there?
7. Why does the speaker state "The page is printed"?
8. Why is the clock described as suffering from "loneliness"?
9. What does the choice of the fox as a metaphor for creative writing suggest?
10. Which genre of poetry does "The Thought-Fox" belong to?

Answers

Assignments

1. Write a critical note on the animal imagery used by Ted Hughes in "The Thought-Fox."
2. In your opinion, why does the speaker use the fox to comment on the nature of the creative process in "The Thought-Fox."
3. How does the movements and nature of the fox in "The Thought-Fox" parallel the creative process?
4. Write a critical appreciation of the poem "The Thought-Fox."
5. Write a detailed account of the contributions of Ted Hughes to British poetry.

Suggested Readings

1. Armitage, Simon. "Over the Hills and Far Away.*" The Guardian*. 25 May 2016. 5 August 2018.
2. Bentley, Paul. *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion & Beyond*. Longman, 1998.
3. Sagar, Keith. *The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes*. Liverpool UP, 2000.
4. "Ted Hughes." *Poetry Foundation*. 3 August 2018. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/ted-hughes>
5. Hughes, Ted and Drue Heinz. "The Art of Poetry, No 71." *The Paris Review*. 1995. 5 August 2018. <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1669/ted-hughes-the-art-of-poetry-no-71-ted-hughes>.

Unit 5
Text

Carol Ann Duffy

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ acquire familiarity with some of the predominant features of late twentieth century literature
▶ contextualise Carol Ann Duffy as a representative poet of her era
▶ detail some of the chief stylistic elements in the selected text
▶ identify some of the predominant themes in the selected text

Prerequisites

"Text" by Carol Ann Duffy is all about the text messages we type on our mobile phones. This short poem belongs to her poetry collection, *Rapture* (2005). The former poet laureate meditates on the activity of texting and shares her thoughts regarding it in this poem. She is actually deliberating over the change in our mode of communication. According to Duffy, texting or sending short messages using our mobile devices has become a popular mode of conversation between friends and family members. The poem makes it clear that the poetess also uses it. But she is not happy with such a soundless conversation.

Keywords

Modern life, Language, Reality, Alienation, Communication

Discussion

2.5.1 Lines 1–4

I tend the mobile now
like an injured bird
We text, text, text
our significant words.

In the first four lines of "Text", the speaker presents the idea directly to the readers. The poem talks about text messaging, which has become a popular format of communication in the modern world. In a sense, our mobile phones have become like our pets, demanding our attention. The speaker tends to her phone as "an injured bird". We spend long hours on this medium of short conversation and often text our "significant words" to our dear ones. Thereafter she refers to the habit of texting which has become an inseparable part of our lives.

2.5.2 Lines 5–8

> I re-read your first,
> your second, your third,
> look for your small xx,
> feeling absurd.

The speaker shares her habit of texting and what she feels about it, in the next four lines of "Text". She reads the messages sent by one of her close friends again and again. She tries to find some gestures of love or adoration in those messages. But somehow this process seems meaningless to her, making her feel absurd. The format of such kind of communication perhaps leaves her with a sense of loneliness. At the time of texting, she might feel connected with the person on the other end; but, in reality, she only has words on her screen without the presence or voice of the sender. Thus, texting creates a different reality and a paradoxical form of connection.

2.5.3 Lines 9-14

> The codes we send
> arrive with a broken chord.
> I try to picture your hands,
> their image is blurred.
> Nothing my thumbs press
> will ever be heard.

In the last six lines of "Text", the speaker visualises text messages as mechanical "codes". Language, which is a living entity of culture, has now become a lifeless medium of communication for technological advancements. Duffy compares texting to "a broken chord". This phrase has a deep and interesting meaning in the poem. A broken chord refers to a musical piece where the entire chord or musical sequence is not fully played out. This refers to the gap in meaning and presence that accompanies texting. While messaging we also send and receive texts in succession. However, it is different to texting in many ways. When we talk to someone in person, there is harmony and spontaneity. In messaging it never happens in that way.

After failing to feel the auditory aspects of texting, the speaker tries to imagine the physical aspects of the sender. She says, "I try to picture your hands, / their image is blurred." Her statement makes it clear she also fails this time. In other words, it is as if the person who sends the message has become an instrument of the mode of communication. It is no longer possible to visualise them. The speaker goes on to declare at the end: "Nothing my thumbs press/ will ever be heard." Messaging, being a visual mechanism of communication, fails to deliver our feelings to a person. It just sends our codified words, nothing else.

2.5.4 Critical Appreciation

The speaker analyses the way in which modern relationships are affected by the technological advancements of the age. Words lose their meaning when they are transited through a text and the meaning of the words becomes blurred for the speaker until she is no longer able to understand them.

She rather uncomfortably admits to the re-checking of her messages, revealing our secret obsession with detecting the often subtle, shifting revelations of love in texts. She admits here to the embarrassment of anxiety over even a missing 'xx', a shorthand for 'kisses', at the end of a message. And no matter how much the speaker may tend to the mobile phone, the reality is that the beloved is not there. Thus, a sense of loss remains.

"Text" focuses on the poetic feelings regarding the modern format of communication, "texting". It discusses how she feels while texting her dear ones. At the beginning of the

poem, the poetess reads some messages on her mobile phone repetitively. While reading those text messages she feels that the process of sending and receiving messages is somehow mechanical. The message which she receives on her phone is like a note in a "broken chord". She can't even imagine the person who is actually sending those messages to her. As a result, she feels dejected about the mental distance that texting has created in her world.

Recap

- ▶ Poem about modern style of communication
- ▶ Text – visual messaging through mobile phones
- ▶ The mobile phone is compared to an injured bird
- ▶ Speaker tends to it as it demands attention
- ▶ Significant words are now 'texted' between the speaker and her companion
- ▶ Speaker anxiously reads and re-reads messages
- ▶ Searching for any gesture or sign of love
- ▶ The texts are codes with a broken chord
- ▶ Lack of physical presence and voice
- ▶ Speaker cannot visualise the sender of the text
- ▶ The speaker's own texts will never be heard again
- ▶ Implying the breakdown of verbal, face-to-face communication

Objective Questions

1. Which form of communication is the poem "Text" about?
2. What is the mobile phone compared to?
3. What does the speaker send in her texts?
4. Why is the speaker anxiously re-reading her texts?
5. Why does the speaker feel absurd?
6. What does the speaker compare her texts to?
7. What does the 'broken chord' signify?
8. Why is it impossible for the speaker to visualise the hands of the sender?
9. What does the speaker seem to find lacking in communication through texting?
10. Which comparison brings out the mechanical nature of the act of texting?

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Answers

1. Mobile Texting
2. An injured bird
3. Significant words
4. Searching for the missing 'xx' in her texts
5. Because she is rereading her texts anxiously for signs of love
6. Codes
7. It signifies the lack of personal connection and human voice in texts
8. The sender is now only an instrument of the message
9. The human connection of face-to-face interactions
10. The comparison of texts to 'codes'

Assignments

1. Based on your reading of the poem "Text", how can the poem's analogy between the mobile phone and the injured bird be validated?
2. How does the act of texting influence the speaker's communication style in the poem, "Text"?
3. Explore the speaker's attitude towards 'texting' in the poem, "Text"?
4. Examine the poem "Text" as a commentary on the influence of technology on modern relationships.
5. Write a critical appreciation of "Text" as a poem about modern life and relationships.

Suggested Readings

1. Gupta, Sudip Das. "Text by Carol Ann Duffy". Poem Analysis, https://poemanalysis.com/carol-ann-duffy/text/. Accessed 31 August 2022.
2. Michelis, Angelica and Anthony Rowland. eds. *The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy: 'Choosing tough words'*. Manchester UP, 2003.
3. Rees-Jones, Deryn. *Carol Ann Duffy*. Northcote House, 1999.

BLOCK – 03

Representative Poetry from Different Countries

Unit 1
Mending Wall

Robert Frost

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ introduce themselves to the poetic style of Robert Frost
▶ identify the formal structure of the poem
▶ identify the elements and symbols in the poem
▶ discuss the meaning of the poem

Prerequisites

Robert Frost (1874-1963), one of the most quoted American poets, is renowned for his simplicity of language. His poetry has won him many laurels, including the Pulitzer Prize and the U.S. Congressional Gold medal. A striking aspect of Frost's poems is their use of regional language and a conversational style.

Though he wrote much after the period of American Romanticism, his poetry has displayed many romantic features. His poetic vision is deeply influenced by an ecological consciousness. This is seen in the focus on imagery and subjects derived from the natural world in his poetry. Further, there is a tendency to focus on the rural, everyday life in his works.

The poem "Mending Wall" speaks at length about how a wall, a human construction, shapes the interaction between people. Set in rural New England, Massachusetts, the poem takes on the rhythm and rituals of life there. The poem provokes readers to consider the purpose of borders between individuals.

Keywords

Limits and boundaries, The worth of work, Traditions, Customs, and Modernity

Discussion

3.1.1 Summary

Lines 1 to 5

There is something there "that doesn't love a wall." This causes the frozen ground to swell beneath it, and the upper stones tumble in the sun. This creates gaps large enough for two people to pass side by side. And then there are hunters who take apart the wall. Here, the term 'something' refers to some unknown mysterious force or something in human nature.

Word Meanings:

Frozen (adj): Devoid of warmth
Swell (v): Increase in size, magnitude, number, or intensity
Tumble (v): Fall down
Pass abreast (adv): walk side by side

Lines 6 to 10

I tracked them down, and tried to fix the spots where hunters didn't leave a single stone in place, as they tried to flush out the rabbits that hid in the wall in order to make their barking dogs happy. No one has seen or heard of these gaps being created.

Lines 11 to 15

However, they are present during the spring mending season. I informed my neighbour beyond the hill, and one day we met to walk the line, and we rebuilt the wall between us as we walked along the wall. He walks on his side of the wall and I on mine.

Word Meanings:

Mending (n): The act of putting something in working order again

Lines 16 to 20

We deal only with whatever rocks have fallen off the wall on our side of it. Some of them look like loaves of bread and some are round like balls, so we pray that they'll stay in place, balanced on top of the wall, saying: "Don't move until we're gone!" Our fingers get chafed from picking up the rocks.

Word Meanings:

Loaves (n): A shaped mass of baked bread that is usually sliced before eating
Chafed (adj): Painful from having the skin abraded

Literary Devices:

Apostrophe: An apostrophe is used when a speaker addresses an absent person or a non-living entity. For example, "Stay where you are unless our backs are turned."

Imagery: Figurative writing or speaking with vivid descriptions presenting or suggesting images. For example, "And some are loaves and some so nearly balls". Here visual imagery is used.

Metaphor: A figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity. For example, "And some are loaves and some so nearly balls". In the poem, the speaker compares the shape of the stones to the shape of bread and a ball.

Lines 21 to 25

It is just another outside activity, each of us on our side of the wall, nothing more.

There is no need for a wall to be there. On my neighbour's side of the wall, there is nothing but pine trees; my side is an apple orchard. It's not like my apple trees are going to cross the wall

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Literary Devices:

Personification: Attributing human characteristics to something that is not human. For example, "My apple trees will never get across, And eat the cones under his pines." Here Apple is personified.

***Visual Imagery*:** For example, "He is all pine and I am apple orchard."

Lines 25 to 30

And eat his pine cones, I say to him. But he just responds, "Good fences are necessary to have good neighbours." Since it is spring and I feel mischievous, I wonder if I could make my neighbor ask himself: Why are they necessary?

Word Meanings:

Mischievous (adj): Naughtily or annoyingly playful

Literary Devices:

Personification: "He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours." Here fences are personified.

Epigram: To epigram means to make a brief but interesting and memorable satirical statement. For example, "He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours.' It means that people should not interfere with each other's businesses in order to live in peace.

Lines 31 to 35

Isn't that only true if you're trying to keep your neighbour's cows out of your fields? There aren't any cows here. If I were to build a wall, I'd want to know what I was keeping in and what I was keeping out, and who was going to be offended by this. There is some force that doesn't love a wall.

Word Meanings:

Offended (adj): Emotionally hurt, upset or annoyed

Lines 36 to 40

That force wants to pull it down. I could propose that Elves are responsible for the gaps in the wall, but it's not exactly Elves, and, anyway, I want my neighbour to figure it out on his own. I see him, lifting up stones, grasping them firmly by the top, in each hand, like an ancient warrior.

Word Meanings:

Elves (n): Fairies that are somewhat mischievous
Grasping (n): The act of gripping something firmly with the hands
Ancient (adj): Very old

Literary Devices:

Simile: It is the comparison between two things. For example, "In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed." The poet compares his neighbour to a "savage" from the primitive age.

Lines 41 to 45

He moves in a deep darkness—not just the darkness of the woods or the trees above. He does not want to think beyond his set idea about the world, and he likes having expressed this idea so clearly. So, he says it again: "Good fences are necessary to have good neighbors." Here, the poet hints at the idea that, even though time has changed, his neighbour doesn't want to change; he stood fast by his father's advice and prefers to dwell in the shadows.

Literary Devices:

Enjambment: It denotes the continuation of a line without a break. For example,
"And he likes having thought of it so well"
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

Visual Imagery: Example, "Not of woods only and the shade of trees."

3.1.2 Analysis

When "Mending Wall" was released, modernism was at its pinnacle. It was a period when literature addressed the dramatic hype of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century industrialisation and urbanization.

Literature at this time emphasised the sense of isolation that many people have felt in a new contemporary world. Literature of this period deviated from conventional literary forms. Modernist writers forged a new path, abandoning metre, rhyme and proper form. In addition, new forms were created. The poem "Mending Wall" is written in free verse.

It is an engaging and intriguing poem about human limits or boundaries in society. The poem tells the story of two neighbours who meet each year in the spring to repair the stone wall separating their farms.

The poem "Mending Wall" places emphasis on the activity of mending a wall, which the speaker and his neighbour do every spring. The speaker of the poem perceives no need for a boundary because none of them has anything precious to keep on their lawns. The poet is of the opinion that fences may be re-

quired if they have cows with them to avoid getting mixed up. But here, there are no such issues. So, repairing the wall is an unreasonable activity.

The poet notices stones falling from the wall and remarks that even nature is not in favour of this fence between the farms. Here the poet emphasises that not everything in nature requires a wall. However, because his neighbour is attached to his traditions, he tries to justify the construction. The poet reveals that, even if times have changed, humans/nations stay staunch in their old ideas and practices, preventing love and compassion from entering their lives by erecting walls and living in their shadows. Through the poem, the poet delves into the nature and characteristics of human relationships.

The poem's argument is not resolved for the readers. The poem embodies all of the uncertainty and disorientation associated with modernism. Through the poem, the poet represents the wall as a symbol of ambiguity, distancing and uniting two people/two nations at the same time. Here, the wall signifies a symbolic representation of separation- a mental barricade. This division works on several levels. It is particularly effective in the names of nationality, religion, caste, and race. It can also be based on social, political, and economic concerns. Although maintaining barriers ensures one's protection and security, they are the primary causes of a lack of consideration among people for each other. They compel people to value private property ownership more. This leads to a reluctance to share resources at times of crisis.

Recap

▶ "Mending Wall" is a modernist poem

▶ Literature of the modern period emphasised a sense of isolation

▶ Literature of the modern period deviated from the conventional literary forms

▶ Modernist poets abandoned metre, rhyme and proper form

▶ New forms were created during the modern period

▶ The poem "Mending Wall" is written in free verse

▶ "Mending wall" is about human limits or boundaries in a society

▶ The poem tells the story of two neighbours building a stone wall across their property

▶ The poem emphasises the activity of mending a wall

▶ The speaker of the poem stresses no need for a boundary wall

▶ The poem explores the nature and characteristics of human relationships

▶ The poet justifies the construction as his neighbour is attached to his tradition in constructing the wall

▶ The poem's argument is not resolved for the readers

▶ The poem conveys the trend of uncertainty and disorientation associated with modernism

▶ The wall in the poem represents a symbol of ambiguity

Objective Questions

1. When was "Mending Wall" published?
2. What happened during the late 19th century and early 20th century?
3. What does literature during the modern period emphasise?
4. What change happened to literature during the modernist period?
5. How did modern writers create a new form?
6. In what form is "Mending Wall" written?
7. What is the poem "Mending Wall" about?
8. What did the poem "Mending Wall" emphasise?
9. What does the speaker of the poem and his neighbour do every spring?
10. What is an unreasonable activity according to the poet?
11. What does the poem mean by 'stones falling from the wall?'
12. Why does the poet justify the wall's construction in the end?
13. What does the wall symbolise in the poem?

Answers

1. "Mending Wall" was published at the pinnacle of modernism.
2. Industrialisation and urbanization
3. A sense of isolation.
4. It deviated from the traditional literary form.
5. By abandoning meter, rhyme, and proper form.
6. Free verse.
7. It is a poem about human limits or boundaries.
8. The poem emphasises the activity of mending a stone wall.
9. Mending a stone wall across their boundaries.
10. Repairing the wall.
11. Nature is not in favour of building the fence.
12. It is because the poet respects the traditional belief of his neighbour.
13. The wall symbolizes the ambiguity of distancing and union of two people/nations.

Assignments

1. Comment on "Mending Wall" as a modernist poem.
2. Examine the various stylistic elements employed in the poem "Mending Wall."
3. In your opinion, what is the relevance of the poem "Mending Wall" in contemporary life?
4. Explore the major themes portrayed in the poem "Mending Wall."
5. How does the act of 'mending a wall' become symbolic in the poem "Mending Wall"?

Suggested Readings

1. Bloom, Harold. ed. *Robert Frost: Modern Critical Views*, Chelsea House, 1986.
2. Fagan, Deidre J. *Critical Companion to Robert Frost: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work.* Facts on File, Inc. 2007.
3. https://literariness.org/2021/02/22/analysis-of-robert-frosts-mending-wall/
4. https://interestingliterature.com/2020/05/robert-frost-mending-wall-analysis/
5. https://poemanalysis.com/robert-frost/mending-wall/

SREENARAYANAGURU
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Unit 2
Telephone Conversation
Wole Soyinka

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ familiarise themselves with the poetic style of Wole Soyinka

▶ describe the literary devices used in the poem

▶ define the themes of the poem

▶ acquire insight into how racism work in micro-structural levels of society

Prerequisites

Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian playwright, novelist, poet, and essayist who writes in the English language. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, becoming the first Sub-Saharan African to be honoured in this category. Soyinka has been a harsh critic of successive Nigerian and African governments, particularly the country's many military dictators and other political tyrants. Soyinka's themes include racial discrimination, humans' inhumanity to humans, political corruption, social justice, and death. His stylistic and linguistic modes include the use of elaborate imagery, satire, antithesis, dramatic dialogue, and biblical allusions.

Some of his important works are *The Lion and the Jewel*, *Kongi's Harvest*, and *Madmen and Specialists*, which come under The genre of drama. His notable novels include *The Interpreters*, *Season of Anomy*, and *Chronicles from the Land of the Happiest People on Earth*. His essay collection is named *Man, Literature and the African World*, and his memoir is named *The Man Died*. His poetry collections include *Poems from Prison*, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, and *Modern Poetry from Africa*, to name a few. The poem "Telephone Conversation" is taken from the poetry collection, titled *Modern Poetry from Africa*. He has also written an autobiography which is named *Ake: The Years of Childhood*.

Wole Soyinka's poetry has often been considered a strong and intense force for social change. The poem "Telephone Conversation" draws the reader's attention to racism at the micro-structural levels of society. It is a lyric poem and it is written in free verse form. The poem takes the form of a dialogue between two people, an African man and a British landlady over the phone regarding the renting of an apartment. When the landlady learns that the speaker is "African," she demands to know how "light" or "dark" the speaker's skin is. Dejected by the question, the man responds by cleverly mocking the landlady's ignorance and preconception.

Keywords

Racism, Ignorance, Prejudiced thoughts, African Identity

Discussion

3.2.1 Summary

Lines 1 to 5

The price is reasonable and the location of the apartment is known for the people who aren't bothered about neighbours (unbiased/ impartial). The landlady affirmed that she lives off the premises of the apartment for rent. Nothing remained other than self-confession. I warned her about my identity as an African as I hate to go on a wasted journey.

Word Meanings:

Indifferent (adj): Showing no care or concern in attitude or action.
Swore (v): To declare or affirm solemnly and formally as true.
Premises (n): Land and the buildings on it.

Literary Devices:

Free verse: Unrhymed lines with no consistent metrical patterns or structure.

Irony: Witty language used to convey insults or scorn, especially saying one thing but implying the opposite. Examples include "location indifferent, Nothing remained But self-confession, Caught I was foully."

Lines 6 to 10

There was complete silence. I presumed the silence seemed to be the result of a good upbringing. But when she voiced herself, I realised that I was wrong. It felt like she was using a long cigarette holder with a gold covering which had lipstick on its body; she asked me how dark was I? I thought I misheard, but I hadn't. She asked again, was I light or very dark.

Word Meanings:

Stench (n): A distinctive odour that is offensively unpleasant.

Literary Devices:

Caesura: A pause or interruption within a line. For example, "How Dark?....."

Imagery: Figurative writing suggesting images. For example, "Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled Cigarette-holder pipped."

Lines 11 to 15

I was surprised to hear such a question from her. I got confused about whether I should press button 'b' or button 'a' on the telephone. I felt a bad odour. I felt a stale breath of public hide and speak. Red telephone booth, red pillar box, red double-tiered omnibus making a sudden brake on the tar road. It was all real! Shamed by the ill-mannered silence, the landlady stressed simplification.

Word Meanings:

Rancid (adj): Smelling of fermentation or staleness.
Squelching (v): Use force to compress.
Dumbfounded (adj): Struck dumb with astonishment and surprise.

Literary Devices:

Imagery: "Red booth. Red pillar box. Red double-tiered Omnibus squelching tar."

Lines 16 to 20

She was kind enough to vary her emphasis by asking if I was dark or very light! I felt like I got a revelation. I asked her, you meant, like plain dark or milk chocolate? Her agreement to the question seemed detached and impersonal.

Word Meanings:

Dumbfounded (adj): As if struck dumb with astonishment and surprise.
Considerate (adj): Showing concern for the rights and feelings of others.
Revelation (n): An enlightenment
Assent (v): To agree or express agreement

Literary Devices:

Pun: A humorous play on words. For example, "plain or milk chocolate?"

Alliteration: It is the repetition of a speech sound in a sequence of nearby words. The term is usually applied to consonants. For example, "clinical, crushing"

Lines 21 to 25

Suddenly I changed my tactic and said West African sepia as my colour. As an afterthought, I said it is the colour marked in my passport as well. I felt she might have done a spectroscopic analysis of my colour range in her mind. Not getting any idea of my colour, and accepting defeat, she asked again with a harsh tone, "WHAT'S THAT?".

Word Meanings:

Impersonality (n): The quality of being impersonal or lack of emotional involvement.

Sepia (n): A shade of brown with a tinge of red colour.

Afterthought (n): Thinking again about a choice previously made.

Spectroscope (n): An optical instrument that measures light as a function of colour.

Concede (v): Give over or surrender.

Literary Devices:

Alliteration: For example, "Silence for spectroscopic Flight of fancy."

Lines 26 to 30

I said it is like brunette. Then she replied that it is dark, isn't it? I said, not overall. Facially I look like a brunette but the palm of my hand and soles of my feet are in peroxide blond colour.

Word Meanings:

Brunette (adj): Marked by dark or relatively dark pigmentation of hair or skin or eyes.

Peroxide (n): A powerful bleaching agent

Blond (n): light-coloured
Literary Devices:

Simile: A figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds. For example, "Like brunette."

Lines 31 to 35

I said sarcastically, how foolish I am madam! My bottom has turned raven black due to sitting down for a prolonged time. I sensed her going to cut the phone, so I asked her for a moment and implored her to have a look at it by herself.

Word Meanings:

Raven (n): Large black bird with a straight bill and long wedge-shaped tail, crow.

Thunderclap (n): A single sharp crash of thunder, a shocking surprise.

Plead (v): Appeal or request earnestly

3.2.2 Analysis

The poem is a stark blow to the practice of racism in western society. As the title of the poem suggests, the poem opens with a telephone conversation between two individuals, an African man, and a British landlady. The poem is written in the form of a first-person narrative.

In the opening line of the poem, the poet calls the property's landlady and admits that he is an African man. The first line depicts that he is doubtful even though the location of the property is known for unprejudiced people. He calls to see if the room is really available for someone of his racial identity. It also reveals that he has had a traumatic past. When the landlady learns that the speaker is black, she falls silent. She keeps her genuine dislike and disapproval of African hidden.

The poet compares the lady to so-called white people of good breeding. They often consider themselves to be educated and thus decent. They do not openly condemn African people, but they continue to possess racial prejudice against them. Simply hearing her voice over the phone allows the speaker of the poem to stereotype the white landlady. He imagines her lips to be coated with lipstick, and that she is smoking and using a gold-tinted cigarette holder. The poet demonstrates that both white and black people are prejudiced because they stereotype people.

The landlady's question on the degree of his darkness infuriates the poet. The poet felt the foul odour of hypocrisy. In public, white people conceal their racial discrimination, but they practice it in private. The speaker is irritated by this double standard, which is highlighted in the poem with the colour red - the red telephone booth, red pillars, and the red bus. The red bus squelching tar represents black people's oppression as a result of racism.

The poet decides to retaliate by using high diction to perplex and mock the landlady. He uses the term 'West African sepia' to define his colour. Unable to identify what it means; the landlady begs for simplification. The poet then makes her more confused by describing the colours on the palm of his hand and soles as 'peroxide blond.' Through these lines, the poet invites the reader's attention to the ignorance of the landlady. Furthermore, the poet sarcastically invites the landlady to have an inspection of his bottom to understand the actual colour, thereby humiliating the landlady for her racist questions.

In this poetic satire, Wole Soyinka ridicules the idea of racism. Through the portrayal of the landlady and the African man the poet draws a contrasting image of what appears to be civilised and what actually is civilised respectively. Even though the landlady is described as a polite, well-bred woman at the beginning of the poem, as the poem proceeds, she is depicted as innately racist. On the other hand, we can see from the speaker's use of high diction and quick wit that he is not the 'savage' that the landlady assumes he is because of his skin colour.

Recap

▶ The poem is a reaction against racism
▶ Telephone conversation between an African man and a British landlady
▶ The poem is written in the form of a first-person narrative
▶ The poem is written in free verse
▶ The poet is doubtful whether the property is available for black people
▶ The landlady became silent when she learns that the speaker is an African
▶ The speaker initially imagined the landlady to be of good breeding
▶ The landlady's question on the degree of his darkness infuriates the poet
▶ The expression of anger in the poem is highlighted through a red telephone booth, red pillars, and a red bus
▶ The squelching of tar under the bus represents black people's oppression
▶ The poet avenges his humiliation by using high sounding words to perplex and mock the landlady
▶ The poet explained his colour as West African sepia
▶ The poet described the colour on the palm of his hand and sole as peroxide blond
▶ The poet highlights the ignorance of the landlady towards the end of the poem
▶ The poet explained the colour of his bottom as raven black

Objective Questions

1. The poem "Telephone Conversation" is written by whom?
2. What does the poem "Telephone Coversation" satirise?
3. In the poem "Telephone Conversation," the conversation is between ....
4. The African man in the poem is described as.......................
5. How is the landlady initially described in the poem?
6. What did the landlady ask?
7. What does the poet compare his skin colour to?
8. What does the poet describe himself towards the end of the conversation?
9. What is the tone of the poem?
10. What colour does the speaker attribute to his palms and soles?

Answers

1. Wole Soyinka
2. Racism
3. African man and White landlady
4. Well-educated and polished
5. Good mannered
6. The skin colour of the African man
7. Milk Chocolate
8. West African sepia
9. Satiric
10. Peroxide blonde

Assignments

1. Write a critical overview of the poem "Telephone Conversation."
2. Analyse the context in which the poem "Telephone Conversation" is written as well as its current importance.
3. Write a short note on the use of visual imagery in the poem "Telephone Conversation".
4. Explore the tone and structure of the poem ""Telephone Conversation".
5. In your opinion, is the title "Telephone Conversation" apt for the poem? Support your answer with examples.

Suggested Readings

1. Ojaide, Tanure. *The Poetry of Wole Soyinka*. Malthouse Press, 1994.
2. https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/telephone-conversation#CriticalOverview.
3. https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-Telephone-Conversation-by-Wole-Soyinka.
4. https://poemanalysis.com/wole-soyinka/telephone-conversation/.

Unit 3
My Grand Mother's House

Kamala Das

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ familiarise themselves with the poetic style of Kamala Das

▶ acquire details regarding confessional poetry and confessional poets

▶ describe the literary devices used in the poem

▶ define the theme of the poem

Prerequisites

Kamala Das (1934-2009) is considered one of the most prominent feminist voices of the post-colonial era. She is a bilingual writer who wrote in both Malayalam (her mother tongue) and English, and she is regarded as a major poet and short story writer in Indian English writing. Her significant contributions to Indian English poetry earned her the title "mother of modern Indian English poetry."

Kamala Das wrote in Malayalam under the pen name Madhavikutty. She later changed her name to Kamala Suraiya after converting to Islam. Her important works include *The Sirens*, *Summer in Calcutta*, *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems* among her poetry, the novel *Alphabet of Lust*, the short story collection *Thanuppu*, and the autobiography *My Story*. She has also received several literary accolades, which include the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, Asian Poetry Prize, and Ezhuthachan Award, to name a few.

The poem that we have to study, "My Grand Mother's House" is taken from her poetry collection *Summer in Calcutta*. The poem is written in a confessional mode. Das's poems are known for their confessional style. Confessional poetry is a form of poetry that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It is the poetry of the personal or "I." Since these poems are written in the first-person perspective, the vast majority of them are likely about the poet's own life. However, this is not always the case.

M.L. Rosenthal coined the term "confessional" in his 1959 article "Poetry as Confession," while reviewing Robert Lowell's book *Life Studies*. Lowell's work had a tremendous influence on the budding poets of his period. The major practitioners of this form

of poetry such as Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton were the students of Robert Lowell. Other poets associated with this genre of poetry include Allen Ginsberg and W D Snodgrass. Before the late 1950s, poets, such as John Berryman and Delmore Schwartz were producing works that are now classified as confessional poems. The confessional poems often focus on the darkest and most intimate experiences of a poet's life or subject matters, such as lost love, insanity, or feelings of depression, drug abuse, infidelity, alcoholism, and suicide, which are considered taboo to discuss. Confessional poems are written in a lyrical style that emphasises the use of literary devices. Metaphors, allusions, aphorisms, and imagery are some of the common literary devices that serve to enhance the confessional poets' lyrical language.

Kamala Das occupies a prominent place when it comes to confessional poets in India, though there are poets like Sarojini Naidu, Toru Dutt, Nissim Ezekiel whose poems also exhibit traces of confessionalism. Kamala Das has used the confessional style effectively throughout her writing career. Das' poetry is mainly introspective, and self-analytic, personal moments are narrated in a conversational voice. This means that, unlike the works of traditional poets, Das' poetry is concerned with domestic scenarios and private thoughts.

The poem "My Grandmother's House," is an autobiographical poem, in which Kamala Das recalls her ancestral home and her late grandmother. This poem is written in the form of a confession, contrasting her current broken state with being unconditionally loved by her grandmother. The poem is composed of 16 lines with no discernible rhyme scheme. The poem has a melancholy tone to it. The poem begins in a nostalgic mood, telling readers about a house far away from her current residence. She once "received love" in that house.

Keywords

Longing, Love, Memory, Affection, Autobiographical poem

Discussion

3.3.1 Summary

Lines 1 to 4

There is a house now far away. At this house, I received love from my grandmother. But after my grandmother's demise, the house slowly and steadily withdrew into silence. I recall my house after my grandmother's death, how the house was reigned by silence and snakes moving among the books that I couldn't read at that time.

Word Meanings:

Withdrew(v): Move away or backward

Literary Devices:

Ellipsis: A literary device used to omit parts of a sentence or phrase. An ellipsis is made

up of three dots, "...", and can be used in a variety of contexts. It may be used by a writer when she wants a character's dialogue to be cut off, leaving other characters and the reader to fill in the blanks. It can also be used to cut off a description, for dramatic effect, to create a sense of mystery, and for other purposes. They are a useful tool for changing the tone of a specific section of a novel, short story, play, or even a poem.

Lines 5 to 8

Out of pain, my blood turned cold like the moon. Many times, I strongly desired to revisit my ancestral house. I wanted to peep through the windows and resurrect my past but the air seemed frozen or still after my grandmother's death. Neither is the air nor it can be displaced because it is frozen.

Word Meanings:

Peer(v): Look searchingly

Literary Devices:

Enjambment: Enjambment occurs when one line continues into the next without a pause, allowing the meaning to continue uninterrupted. Because there is no need to pause or stop, this poetic device may confuse the reader. The goal is to keep reading while making sense.

Personification: Personification is a literary device in which human characteristics are projected onto inanimate objects. The 'blind eyes of windows' and 'the frozen air.'

Simile: A figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds (usually formed with 'like' or 'as'). For example, 'My blood turned cold like the moon.'

Lines 9 to 12

I yearn to pick up an armful of darkness, from my ancestral house and carry it to my present one, to keep behind my bedroom like a brooding dog.

Word Meaning:

Despair (n): A state in which all hope is lost or absent
Armful (n): A quantity that can be contained in the arms
Brooding (adj): Deeply or seriously thoughtful

Literary Devices:

Simile: For example, the darkness is compared to a brooding dog.

Personification: 'an armful of darkness'

Lines 13 to 16

I'm asking you my darling, can you believe it, that I lived in such a house where I was once loved and respected. I am now lost and now I am begging at strangers' doors seeking love at least in the form of a small tip but all in vain.

Word Meanings:

Proud (adj): Feeling self-respect or pleasure in something by which you measure your self-worth.

3.3.2 Analysis

The poem begins with Kamala Das nostalgically reminiscing about her grandmother's house, where she had spent her childhood days and received immeasurable love from her grandmother. Her grandmother's house was a safe haven where she felt loved by all. After her grandmother died, the poet claims that even the house was overcome with grief, and she accepted her seclusion. Only dead silence hung over the house, a sense of desolation coursing through it. In the second line, el-

lipses (a few dots) describe the poet's intense pain and sorrow over her grandmother's death, which she cannot express verbally. There was a profound connotation of emotional attachment, affection and love for her grandmother beneath her stillness.

She recalls that she couldn't read books at that time, but now after the desolation and grief brought up by her grandmother's death, she had a feeling of snakes moving among them—a feeling of deadness, horror, and repulsion—which made her blood run cold and her face pale as the moon. She often fantasizes about returning to the old house, which has unconditionally bestowed upon her pleasures and indulgences. She wanted to peep through the windows and resurrect her past to relieve her frustration and anguish, but the air seemed frozen or still after her grandmother's death. It was once the poet's territory of security and protection, which is now sadly missing in her new home. Now the house exists only in her mind, possibly miles away from her current residence.

The poet says, "in wild despair," she would gladly pick up a handful of Darkness from the house and bring it back to her home to "lie behind my bedroom door". This is so that memories of the old house and its comforting darkness could fill assurance and happiness in her current life. In the face of acute isolation and alienation, she discovers darkness to be a precious thing to be preserved because it pro-vides sustenance, hope, and life. The poet here uses the simile of a brooding dog to compare it with the darkness of her old house. Aside from all of the negative connotations associated with darkness, it is used here in a positive context. It alludes to the room's protective and comforting shadow.

The poet had woven an ironic element into the poem's final lines to contrast the experience with the present. The poet says that it is difficult to believe that she once lived in such a house, was so loved by all, and lived her life with pride. Her former happiness stands in stark contrast to her current situation, in which she is completely devoid of love and pride. She claims that in her desperate search for love, she has lost her way, because she did not receive any feelings of love from the people, she considered her own; she now has to knock "at strangers' doors" and beg them for love, if not in large amounts, then in small change.

The poem is inspired by her disappointment with her expectation of unconditional love from the person she loves. The image of the ancestral home represents her grandmother's strong support and unconditional love in the poem. The imagery is personal and beautifully expresses her plight in her current loveless life. As a result, the old house became a symbolic retreat for her to a world of innocence, purity, and simplicity, a prevalent world where love and happiness are still possible.

Recap

> ▶ The poet spends her childhood days at her grandmother's house
> ▶ Grandmother's house as a haven
> ▶ Grandmother's death devastated her house and the poet
> ▶ Snakes moving among books – feeling of deadness, horror, and repulsion

- ► The air at the house seemed frozen or still after her grandmother's death
- ► Safety and love are missing in the poet's new house
- ► The poet would love to pick the darkness from her old house as a companion
- ► The darkness is compared to a brooding dog
- ► The poet lived in her old house with pride
- ► She has lost her pride in her new house
- ► The poet lost her way in her desperate search for love
- ► Now the poet begs at strangers' doors for love

Objective Questions

1. What kind of a poem is "My Grandmother's House"?
2. What is the speaker of 'My Grandmother's House' proud of?
3. When did the speaker of 'My Grandmother's House' live with her grandmother?
4. Who is the speaker in the poem?
5. What moved freely in the silent house?
6. What style of poem is "My Grandmother's House"?
7. "My Grandmother's House" was published in which anthology?
8. Which expressions reinforce the idea of desperation?
9. What happened to the house after the death of the grandmother?
10. What stands for "an armful of darkness" in the poem?
11. The air in the grandmother's house is frozen. Why?
12. How does the house itself share the grief of grandmother's death?

Answers

1. An Autobiographical poem/ Confessional poem
2. Her grandmother's house
3. During her childhood
4. Kamala Das
5. Snakes
6. Lyric
7. *Summer in Calcutta*
8. The expressions are 'blind eyes of windows' and 'the frozen air'

9. After her death, the house withdrew into silence and snakes moved among the books.
10. Memories of the grandmother's house.
11. Due to silence and loneliness
12. The house withdrew into silence and snakes moved among the books.

Assignments

1. Comment on Kamala Das as a confessional poet.
2. Examine the women characters in Kamala Das's poems.
3. Examine 'love' as a theme in the poem "My Grand Mother's House".
4. How does the imagery used in the poem "My Grand Mother's House" enrich its message?
5. Write a critical appreciation of the poem "My Grand Mother's House".

Suggested Readings

1. "My Grandmother's House by Kamala Das." (2016, Dec 08). https://studymoose.com/my-grandmothers-house-by-kamla-das-essay

2. Das, Kamala. "My Grandmother's House." *Selected Poems*, edited by Devindra Kohli. Penguin, 2014.

3. https://www.indianenglishlit.com/2021/11/poem-my-grandmother-house-summary-and-critical-appreciation.html

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Unit 4
The Death of the Bird

A. D. Hope

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ familiarise themselves with the poetic style of A. D. Hope

▶ identify the themes in the poem

▶ discuss symbolic elements in the poem

▶ critically appreciate the poem

Prerequisites

The Australian poet A.D. Hope was once playfully referred to as "the 20th century's greatest 18th-century poet." This is in reference to the fact that he drew inspiration from Alexander Pope and other poets of the Augustan age. He was famous for his satires and elegies, as well as for his critical scholarship.

In "The Death of the Bird", Hope uses the metaphor of a migratory bird to discuss the dark theme of death. Specifically, the poem deals with the idea of a universe that is indifferent to death. This poem highlights a feature of Hope's writing, mainly that despite using traditional forms, the content of his poetry is modern and innovative.

Keywords

Death, Life, Reality of the world, Metaphor, Journey

Discussion

3.4.1 Summary

Stanza 1

There is one last migration for every bird. The winter is here which warms her heart once more. The thought of the journey to the summer place fills her with joy. The travel course is marked vividly on her map.

Word Meanings:

Migration (n): The movement from one country or locality to another

Vividly (adv): In a clear manner

Stanza 2

Every year a particular place on the map, which is divided by an entire hemisphere, calls her back. She has been there so many times that she clearly knows the way. In a sense, going away also means coming back home.

Stanza 3

She is back home now, but the memory of the other place has turned into a passion with which she feeds her young ones and builds them a nest with straws to live in. But in her heart, the memory of that other place is still beating. It is haunting her like ghosts and her love to come back again is termed exiled love.

Word Meanings:

Straw (n): Plant fibre used for making baskets and hats

Exiled (v): Expulsion from a country

Stanza 4

The sands are green, with a valley mirage. The palm tree casts a shadow that is not its own. A cool breeze blows down the long architrave of a temple or palace from stone moorland scarps.

Word Meanings:

Mirage (n): Something illusory and unattainable

Architrave (n): The moulding around a door or window

Moorland (n): Open land usually with peaty soil covered with heather and bracken and moss

Scarps (n): The moulding around a door or window

Stanza 5

Slowly, the call to go to that other place grows stronger in her. That delicate voice is more urgent with despair. Custom and fear no longer constrain her. She finally flies into the waste leagues of air.

Word Meanings:

Despair (n): A state in which all hope is lost or absent

Leagues (n): An obsolete unit of distance of the variable length

Stanza 6

The bird now looks like a dot in the vast region that she has entered. She was single and frail, unsure of her place. She seems alone even among other companions. She seems lost in the unfriendly blueness of space.

Literary Devices:

Transferred epithet: It happens when an adjective usually used to describe one thing is transferred to another. For example, "Vanishing Speck" in "A vanishing speck in those inane dominions."

Stanza 7

The bird has travelled far. She can now sense the season that she has searched for. The invisible thread broke while she was flying and her guiding spark of instinct started to flicker suddenly without any warning or reason.

Word Meanings:

Flicker (v): Flash intermittently

Stanza 8

The bird is trying her best to find a way but the whole world has suddenly become trackless. Without instinct, the light has also become a wilderness, without any sign to guide her. The

vast and complicated map of hills and rivers mocks her small wisdom.

Stanza 9

Darkness rises from the eastern valleys, and the strong winds knock her. It ultimately kills the bird. The earth which is so great feels no grief for any death. But, it bears the microscopic burden of the bird's death.

3.4.2 Analysis

The poet is speaking about a bird nearing the end of her life in this poem. It is a migratory bird that migrates from one location to another in search of food and comfort. When the seasons change, she feels as though the cosmos is inviting her back to her temporary home. Even while the readers may feel The bird is going away, in a way, it's coming home; in fact, returning home. This travel has become a way of life for the bird.

After relocating, the memory of the previous location becomes a passion with which she feeds her tiny kids and constructs the straw nest in which they will dwell. Yet, the remembrance of that other location remains veiled but still pounding in her heart. It haunts her like ghosts. In the poem, the poet is attempting to demonstrate, almost from the perspective

of a bird, how the bird's grieving has caused her to see the mirage (illusion) of valleys on the dunes. Perhaps it's a desert.

The bird's desire to visit that other location becomes greater with time. She can't take it any longer. She eventually flies into the wastelands of air. In the next verse, the poet introduces the reader to the idea of estrangement by utilizing the phrases single, frail, alone, lost, and unfriendliness. The bird now appears foolish and feeble in comparison to the enormous expanse she has visited. Her presence there fades away like a disappearing speck. Even with other friends, the bird is alone. The bird is also frail due to its age and travel.

Finally, darkness overtakes the soaring bird, and she is no longer able to sustain her flight. She is killed by strong winds. The poem's last words depict the poet's perspective on the bird's life. In pitiless nature, the death of a bird is accepted "without grief or malice," but just as one of the innumerable lives and deaths that happen in the world every day. Nonetheless, the sensitivity with which the author depicts the bird's existence contradicts this. The poem itself humanizes the bird, giving it enormous respect.

Recap

- ▶ The poet is speaking about a bird nearing the end of her life in this poem
- ▶ The bird is a migratory bird
- ▶ When the seasons change the bird will feel the universe is inviting back to her temporary home
- ▶ Going away in a way is coming home, in fact, returning home
- ▶ After relocating, the memory of the previous location becomes a passion for the bird
- ▶ The remembrance of that other location remains hidden in her heart

- The memories of that other location haunt her like ghosts
- The poet is attempting to demonstrate the life of the bird, almost from the perspective of a bird
- The bird's grieving has caused her to see the mirage (illusion) of valleys on the dune
- The bird's desire to visit that other location becomes greater with time
- She eventually flies into the wastelands of air
- The poet seemed to be anticipating her travel as futile
- The idea of estrangement in the poem is signified through phrases such as single, frail, alone, lost, and unfriendliness
- The bird appears foolish and feeble in comparison to the enormous expanse she has visited
- Her presence there fades away like a disappearing speck
- Even with other friends, the bird is alone
- The bird is also frail due to its age and travel
- Finally, darkness overtakes the soaring bird, and she is no longer able to sustain her flight
- The poem's last words depict the poet's perspective on the bird's life
- In pitiless nature, the death of a bird is accepted without grief or malice
- The death of the bird is one among the innumerable lives and deaths which happen in the world every day
- The poem itself humanizes the bird, giving it enormous respect

Objective Questions

1. What is the subject of the poem?
2. What sort of bird is the poet referring to?
3. Who invites the bird back to her temporary home?
4. What haunts like ghosts?
5. What caused the illusion to the bird?
6. What is the bird's desire?
7. What are the phrases used in the poem to depict estrangement?
8. How is the bird presented in the poem against the vastness of the sky?
9. What kills the bird?
10. Why does the bird appear foolish?

Answers

1. The poet is speaking about a bird nearing the end of her life in this poem.
2. A migratory bird.
3. The Universe/Cosmos.
4. The remembrance/ memory of the other location.
5. Grievance has caused her the illusion.
6. To visit the other location from where she left.
7. Single, frail, alone, lost and unfriendliness.
8. The bird is portrayed as a disappearing speck.
9. The strong wind kills the bird.
10. The complicated landscape she has to travel mocks her small wisdom.

Assignments

1. Analyse the poem and list out its literary elements.
2. Write a critical appreciation of the poem, "The Death of the Bird".
3. How does the poem "The Death of the Bird" use nature imagery to convey its underlying themes?
4. What does the bird's migration symbolise in the poem "The Death of the Bird"?
5. Comment on the portrayal of the bird's last migration in the poem "The Death of the Bird"?

Suggested Readings

1. Hart, Kevin. *A.D. Hope*. Oxford UP, 2008.
2. https://englishsummary.com/the-death-of-the-bird-summary/
3. https://leverageedu.com/blog/poetic-devices/
4. https://allpoetry.com/The-Death-of-the-Bird

Unit 5
Questions from a Worker Who Reads
Bertolt Brecht

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ introduce themselves to the poetic style of Bertolt Brecht

▶ identify the formal structure of the poem

▶ discuss the meaning behind the poem

▶ critically appreciate the themes in the poem

Prerequisites

The poem "Questions from a Worker…" revolves around the seemingly simple act of reading. However, instead of a scholar or a student, it is a worker who reads. Written by Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), the work focuses our attention on the manner in which an oppressed member of society might read. This is in line with the concerns of Brecht, whose works lean towards Marxism.

The German theatre practitioner, Brecht, employs literature as a way of exploring his social and political theories. He views it as a tool for fighting against rigid systems of capitalist oppression. The current work provokes the reader to view the world from the point of view of the worker, thereby challenging his or her perspective on history.

Keywords

Working class, History, Upper class, Labourers, Historical events

Discussion

3.5.1 Summary

Lines 1 to 5

Who built Thebes of the Seven Gates, the powerful city in central Greece? If we read the history books, we can find the names of kings. But, I wonder, did the kings transport the rock lumps? Babylon was destroyed numerous times, but who rebuilt it each time? Was it the kings or labourers?

Word Meanings:

Lumps (n): A compact mass
Numerous (adj): Amounting to a large indefinite number

Lines 6 to 10

Where did the labourers who strived to build the golden city of Lima, go to live after they completed building the city? Where did the masons go after building the great wall of China? Who erected the great arches of Rome which proclaim the great victories of Roman kings?

Word Meanings:

Strived (v): To exert much effort or energy

Masons (n): A craftsman who works with stone or brick

Proclaim (v): Declare formally

Lines 11 to 15

Who did the Caesars triumph over? Had Byzantium, so lauded in song, only palaces for its people? Even on the night that the ocean engulfed the fabled city of Atlantis, the drowning people cried out for their slaves

Word Meanings:

Triumph (n): A successful ending of a struggle or contest

Lauded (v): Praise, glorify

Engulfed (v): Cover completely

Fabled (adj): Celebrated in fable or legend

Drowning (v): Die from being submerged in water

Lines 16 to 21

The young Alexander conquered India. Was he alone? Caesar defeated the Gauls. Did he not even have a cook with him? When his armada was destroyed, Philip of Spain sobbed, was he the only one who sobbed?

Word Meanings:

Conquer (v): Bring under control by force or authority

Sobbed (v): Weep convulsively

Lines 22 to 24

The Seven Years War was won by Frederick the Second. Who else did it? Every page is a triumph. Who prepared the feast for the victorious?

Lines 25 to 28

Every ten years, a great man is born. Who paid the bill? There are so many reports. There are so many questions.

3.5.2 Analysis

The poem was written to criticise traditional narratives that credited tremendous achievements to heroic persons and monarchs. The poem claims that such accomplishments would not have been achievable without the efforts of numerous regular individuals. Brecht uses a series of rhetorical questions to build up his argument in this poem.

The poem emphasises the political perspective that workers are vital to a society's political, economic, and social actions. Workers include builders, masons, and labourers of various kinds, as well as troops who enable rulers to conquer nations. Brecht constructs an argument that in the past, people laboured to create numerous buildings, structures, fortifications, and so on, as well as to help win battles. The name or reputation for what was accomplished, however, was always given to the leaders - the monarchs who issued the order or the commander who lead everyone.

Brecht believed that the attitude towards the vision of history that had been advanced thus far had been unjust. Those who provided directions, monitored, and threatened were given credit, but not those who really worked. What is required is a truthful account of human progress, with credit given to those who truly merited it.

Recap

- ▶ The poem is a criticism of the achievements credited to kings and heroes from the legends
- ▶ The poem claims achievements would not have been possible without help from common people
- ▶ Bertolt Brecht uses rhetorical questions to build his arguments
- ▶ The poem emphasizes the importance of workers/ working class
- ▶ Workers include laborers of various kinds as well as soldiers
- ▶ The poem claims that the workers are always neglected while reputation always goes to the leaders
- ▶ Brecht believes history had been unfair towards the workers/ working class
- ▶ Brecht stresses a truthful account of human progress

Objective Questions

1. What does the poem criticise?
2. How does Brecht build his arguments in the poem?
3. What does the poem emphasise?
4. What is the poet complaining about?
5. What does the poet desire?
6. Who strove to build the golden city of Lima?
7. Which country did the young Alexander conquer?
8. What type of question is "Who else did it?"
9. What is the name of the fabled city engulfed by the ocean?
10. Which architectural structures proclaim the great victories of Roman kings?

Answers

1. The poem criticises traditional narratives that credited tremendous achievements to heroic persons and monarchs.
2. By asking a series of rhetorical questions.
3. The poem emphasises the political perspective that workers are vital to a society's political, economic, and social actions.
4. The poet complaints about the negligence in recognising the work of the working class
5. A truthful account of human progress, with credit given to those who truly merited it.
6. Labourers
7. India
8. Rhetorical question
9. Atlantis
10. The great arches of Rome

Assignments

1. Examine the historical background of the poem.
2. Write a detailed critical appreciation of the poem.
3. How does the poem shift the readers' attention towards the historical role of the working class?
4. Discuss the use of rhetorical questions in the poem "Questions From a Worker Who Reads."
5. Explain the theme of the poem as presented in the following lines: "Every ten years, a great man in born. Who paid the bill?"

Suggested Readings

1. Thomson, Philip. *The Poetry of Brecht: Seven Studies*. North Carolina UP, 2020.
2. Brecht, Bertolt. *The Collected Poems of Bertolt Brecht*. United States, Liveright, 2018.
3. http://oceanictechno.blogspot.com/2013/09/a-worker-reads-history-analysis.html

Unit 6
Tonight I can Write the Saddest Lines
Pablo Neruda

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ familiarise themselves with the poetic style of Pablo Neruda

▶ discuss the theme of the poem

▶ identify the literary elements in the poem

▶ describe the formal structure of the poem

Prerequisites

Pablo Neruda, originally Neftal Ricardo Reyes Basoalto, was born on July 12, 1904, in the Chilean town of Parral. He lived a life full of poetry and politics. In 1923, he sold all he owned to fund the publishing of his debut book, *Crepusculario* ("Twilight"). To avoid controversy with his family, who disapproved of his career, he published the book under the pen name "Pablo Neruda." He found a publisher the following year with *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada (Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair)*. The work elevated Neruda, who dropped out of college at the age of twenty to devote himself to writing poetry.

"Tonight I can write the Saddest lines," also known as "Poem 20," in his book *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* was first published in 1924 when Neruda was just 19 years old. The book contains poems filled with his "most tormented adolescent passions": it chronicles the journey of love, passion, and grief. In this poem, the speaker addresses the loneliness, anguish, and uncertainty of a break-up. The poem is a monologue expressing the pain of a jilted lover.

The poem is composed in free verse, with small stanzas of one or two lines each, most of which are end-stopped. It employs a mix of hyperbolic and sentimental language to contrast the speaker's intense emotions with his uncertainty and depressed mood.

Keywords

Lost love, Memory, Pain, Poetry, Nature

Discussion

3.6.1 Summary

Lines 1 to 4

I can write the saddest poem tonight. For example, I may write, "the night sky is filled with faraway, trembling blue stars." The wind twirls about in the night sky, making a song-like sound. Tonight, I can compose the saddest poetry I've ever written. I loved her, and sometimes she loved me back.

Word Meanings:

Trembling (adj): Vibrating slightly and irregularly

Twirls (v): Turn in a twisting or spinning motion

Literary Devices:

Personification: The act of attributing human characteristics to abstract ideas. For example, the stars are given the human quality of being able to shiver. The nature is portrayed in a way that, it seems to sympathise with his love.

Visual Imagery: vivid descriptions presenting or suggesting images. For example, "The night is starry and the stars are blue and shiver in the distance." Here the colour blue symbolises depression and loneliness.

Lines 5 to 7

On nights like this, I used to hold her in my arms. I kissed her several times beneath the endless sky. "I loved her, and sometimes she loved me too" (Here, the poet seems to be doubtful about his beloved's love for him). It was difficult not to fall in love with her dark, steady gaze. I can write the saddest poem tonight. I can't believe I've lost her.

Lines 8 & 9

Now that she's gone, the wide, unending night appears even more vast and infinite. Poetry pours on my spirit like dew on the grass in the morning. It makes no difference that my love was insufficient for her. It's a starry night, and she's nowhere to be found.

Literary Devices:

Simile: A figure of speech that expresses a resemblance between things of different kinds (usually formed with 'like' or 'as'). For example, "And the verse falls to the soul like dew to the pasture." Also, the vastness of the sky is contrasted with their finite love.

Lines 10 & 11

That's all there is. I can hear a voice singing in the distance. Far away. My heart longs for her. My gaze is drawn to her, and I want to bring her closer. My heart searches for her as well, but she is nowhere to be found. (The lines express the poet's overwhelming desire to be with his love)

Lines 12 & 13

This night is similar to the ones we used to spend together, with the same moonlight making the same trees gleam white. But she and I, the individuals we spent those nights as, have changed. I don't love her as much as I used to, but I did love her a lot. My voice sought to travel through the wind so she might hear me.

Word Meanings:

Gleam (v): Shine brightly

Lines 14 to 16

She'll be someone else's girlfriend, just like she was before my kisses. Her voice, her gleaming body, the infinite depths of her gaze. I don't love her anymore, for sure, but maybe

I do. Love passes so quickly, yet moving on takes so long. Because I kept her in my arms on nights like this one, and now my soul hurts for her loss. Even if this is the final time, she causes me pain and these are the last sad lines I write about her.

3.6.2 Analysis

The poet laments the loss of his love in this poem. He believes that the great sadness he is experiencing will allow him to pen the saddest sentences ever penned. He expresses his pain via night imagery. He has the impression that the night, like his heart, has been broken. He imagines the song is being sung for him by the night breeze. Although the poet is certain of his feelings for his lover, he raises uncertainties about his beloved's feelings for him by stating that she loved him at times. This shows that her affection for him was not particularly consistent.

The night brings back memories of his time with his beloved. He claims that no one can help but fall in love with her stunning eyes.

The poet is disappointed that they are no longer in love. His song is motivated by his grief over a lost love. He casts his grief onto nature, believing that the night is as depressed as he is. He is unwilling to accept his loss, and his eyes continue to look for her even though he knows she is no longer with him.

He believes they were different from what they are now. The lovers have changed because of the lack of affection. The poet believes he is no longer in love with her. He will never forget the way he loved her. He is also disappointed that she will now belong to someone else. Everything he once adored about her will now belong to someone else.

The poet is unsure whether he still loves her. He believes that while love is fleeting, it is impossible to forget the love they once shared. He is reminded of her by the night. He's made the decision to go on with his life and forget about his love. He is confident that this is his final poem for her. His soul, on the other hand, is unable to accept the loss.

Recap

- ▶ The poet is lamenting the loss of his love
- ▶ The poet believes the sadness he experiences will help him in writing the saddest poem ever written
- ▶ He expresses his pain through night imagery
- ▶ He has the impression that the night, like his heart, has been broken
- ▶ He imagines the song is being sung for him by the night breeze
- ▶ The poet raises uncertainties about his beloved's feelings for him
- ▶ The poet's lover's feelings towards the poet were inconsistent
- ▶ The night reminds him of his time with his lover
- ▶ He claims that no one can help but fall in love with her stunning eyes
- ▶ The poet is disappointed that they are no longer in love
- ▶ His song is inspired by his sadness over a lost love
- ▶ He projects his pain onto nature

- The poet is unwilling to accept his loss
- He believes they were different from what they are now
- The lovers have changed because of the lack of affection
- The poet believes he is no longer in love with her
- He will never forget the way he loved her
- The poet is disappointed that his love will now belong to someone else
- The poet is unsure whether he still loves her
- He believes that while love is fleeting, it is impossible to forget the love they once shared
- He's made the decision to go on with his life and forget about his love
- He is confident that this is his final poem for her
- His soul is unable to accept the loss

Objective Questions

1. Why does the poet lament?
2. What makes the poet believe that he can write the poem?
3. How does the poet express his pain?
4. How is night portrayed in the poem?
5. What does the poem compare the night to?
6. Who sang the song for the poet?
7. What is the poet uncertain about?
8. What brings memories of his beloved?
9. What was not consistent, according to the poet?
10. What does the poet claim?
11. What is the poet's disappointment?
12. What is the motivation for the poem?
13. What does the poet cast his sadness on?
14. What caused the lover to change?
15. What is difficult to forget, according to the poet?
16. What does the night remind the poet of?
17. What decision does the poet make?
18. What is the poet confident about?
19. What is it that is unable to accept loss?

Answers

1. The poet laments because he has lost his love.
2. The great sadness he experiences after the loss of his lover.
3. The poet expresses his pain through night imagery.
4. Broken/Shattered.
5. Shattered heart of the poet.
6. The night breeze.
7. The poet is unsure of his lover's feelings for him.
8. Lover's affection.
9. The night.
10. He claims that no one can help but fall in love with her stunning eyes.
11. The poet is disappointed that they are no longer in love.
12. The poet's grief over a lost love.
13. He casts his grief onto nature.
14. Lack of affection.
15. The love they once shared.
16. The night reminds the poet of his lover.
17. To go on with his life and forget about his love.
18. He is confident that this is his final poem for his love.
19. The poet's soul is unable to accept his loss.

Assignments

1. Write a detailed critical appreciation of the poem.
2. Examine the themes and symbols used in the poem.
3. Does nature reflect the emotions of the speaker in the poem "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines"? Support your answer with appropriate examples.
4. What literary devices are used to emphasise the theme of 'lost love' in the poem?
5. Write a short note on the poem "Tonight I Can Write the Saddest Lines" as an example of a lyric.

Suggested Readings

1. de Costa, Rene. *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda*. Harvard UP, 1979.
2. Wilson, Jason. *A Companion to Pablo Neruda: An Evaluation of Neruda's Poetry*. Tameisis, 2008.
3. https://study.com/learn/lesson/tonight-i-can-write-pablo-neruda-summary-themes-analysis.html
4. https://poemanalysis.com/pablo-neruda/tonight-i-can-write/

Unit 7
Possibilities
Wisława Szymborska

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ introduce themselves to the poetic style of Wislawa Szymborska

▶ familiarise themselves with the formal structure of the poem

▶ identify the theme in the poem

▶ describe the poetic elements in the poem

Prerequisites

Wislawa Szymborska was born on July 2, 1923, in Bnin, a tiny village in western Poland. Szymborska wrote more than fifteen books of poetry throughout her lifetime. Some of her books include *Monologue of a Dog*, *Miracle Fair: Selected Poems of Wislawa Szymborska*, *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems, People on a Bridge*, and more. She is also the author of *Nonrequired Reading*, a collection of prose works.

Her poetry is strongly influenced by Polish history, from WWII to Stalinism. Szymborska was also a very intimate poet who examined the vast truths that occur in commonplace, daily things. Her poetry explores domestic, everyday aspects and events against the backdrop of history. Her poetry is distinguished by wit, sarcasm, and deceptive simplicity.

"Possibilities," like many of Wislawa Szymborska's poetry, discusses the theme of human life. In "Possibilities," Szymborska tackles the challenging job of expressing the abstract idea of human individuality. She guides the reader through an investigation of uniqueness using her knowledge and expertise. The poem's lack of stanzas and rhyme patterns generate tones that resemble life's inherent instability.

Keywords

Individuality, The role of choices, Opportunities, Juxtapositions, Unique decisions

Discussion

3.7.1 Summary

Lines 1 to 4

I prefer watching movies. Cats are my favourites. The Oak trees near the Warts are my favourites. Dickens is my favourite author above Dostoyevsky.

Literary Devices:

Assonance: It is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line. For example, the sound of /e/ in "I prefer Dickens to Dostoyevsky."

Anaphora: It is the repetition of a word or expression. For example, the word 'I prefer' is used throughout the poem.

Lines 5 to 8

I prefer to like individual people rather than loving the whole of humanity. I prefer to keep a needle and thread on hand in case of any emergency. Green is my favourite colour.

Lines 9 to 12

I prefer not to hold that reason is solely the fault for everything. I prefer exceptions. And also, I prefer to leave early. I wish to talk to physicians about something else other than diseases, ailments, or medications.

Lines 13 to 16

I like the old fine-lined drawings better. I feel as though the absurdity of writing poems is preferable to the absurdity of not writing poems. When it comes to love, I favour vague anniversaries that can be celebrated every day. I appreciate moralists who make no promises.

Word Meanings:

Absurdity (n): Something that is ridiculous

Vague (adj): Not clearly expressed or understood

Moralist (n): Someone who demands exact conformity to rules and forms

Literary Devices:

Consonance: It is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line. For example, the sound /r/ in, "I prefer, where love's concerned, nonspecific anniversaries"

Lines 17 to 20

I prefer people who are deceptive and at the same time kind rather than over-truthful people. I prefer people dressed up in civilian clothes rather than in military attires. I prefer those countries which are conquered rather than those countries which are trying to conquer other countries. I would like to have some sort of uncertainty in my life.

Word Meanings:

Deceptive (adj): Causing one to believe what is not true or fail to believe what is true

Conquer (v): Bring under control by force or authority

Literary Devices:

Alliteration: It is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line. For example, the sound /k/ in "I prefer conquered to conquering countries."

Oxymoron: It is the conjoining of contradictory terms. For example, "cunning kindness"

Lines 21 to 24

I'd rather be in the hell of chaos than in the hell of order. I prefer Grimm's fairy tales to the front pages of newspapers. I prefer flowers without leaves to leaves without flowers. I

prefer dogs with long tails.

Word Meanings:

Chaos (n): A state of extreme confusion and disorder

Literary Devices:

Allusion: It is a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, event, or another literary work or passage. For example, the biblical idea of hell in the line "I prefer the hell of chaos to the hell of order."

Lines 25 to 28

Because my eyes are dark, I love light eyes. A desk with drawers is my preference. I prefer many things I haven't said here to the many things I haven't stated here. I prefer loose zeroes to those hidden behind a secret message.

Literary Devices:

Consonance: For Example, the repetition of the sound /n/ in " I prefer many things that I haven't mentioned here"

Lines 29 to 32

I like the twilight time or the time between day and night when the insects are out tonight. Since I have made these remarks, I want them to continue like that. I prefer not to inquire as to how much longer or when. And I prefer to consider the notion that existence has its own reason for existing.

Word Meanings:

Twilight (n): The time of day immediately following sunset

Inquire (v): Have a wish or desire to know something

Notion (n): A vague idea in which some confidence is placed

Literary Devices:

Alliteration: For Example, the sound /t/ in "I prefer the time of insects to the time of stars."

3.7.2 Analysis

The poem is primarily a narrative. The poem illustrates that every human being is unique, as are their tastes. As a result, one should avoid following current patterns. Instead, one should make a difference in life by keeping track of their unique yet interesting choices.

The poem expresses the speaker's thoughts about choosing varied choices in life. It starts with the speaker discussing her unusual choices. She reveals her preferences, which make her happy. The poet claims that she favours cats over other animals, she likes watching movies over other things, and she prefers reading Dickens' works to Dostoyevsky's. She also discusses her favourite colour, her habits, and the creative opportunities that arise when she stands behind the things she values. The juxtaposition of numerous concepts in the poem demonstrates that her decisions are not in line with societal norms. Thus, through the poem, the poet portrays her regular yet thrilling life choices which reveal her desire to be different and unique.

Throughout the poem, the speaker attempts to spread the concept that one should not waste one's life's opportunities. Instead, one should strive to figure out what kinds of things may provide them with a lot of joy.

Recap

▶ The poem is a narrative
▶ The poem illustrates that every human being is unique, as are their tastes.
▶ Make difference in life by keeping track of our unique yet interesting choices
▶ The poem expresses the speaker's thoughts about choosing varied choices in life
▶ The poet prefers cats to other animals
▶ The poet like watching movies over other things
▶ The poet prefers reading Dickens' works to Dostoyevsky.
▶ The poet's decisions are not in line with the societal norms
▶ The poem portrays the poet's desire to be different and unique
▶ One should not waste one's opportunities
▶ One should strive to find out what makes one happy

Objective Questions

1. What is the structure of the poem?
2. What does the poem illustrate?
3. What, according to the poet, should a person avoid?
4. What, according to the poet, should a person do to make a difference in their life?
5. What does the poem express about the speaker's thoughts?
6. What does the poem demonstrate by juxtaposing numerous concepts?
7. What does the poet desire?
8. What does the speaker want to propagate?
9. Why does the speaker prefer light eyes?
10. What does the speaker prefer to the front pages of newspapers?

Answers

1. Narrative
2. The poem illustrates that every human being is unique, as are their tastes.
3. A person should avoid following existing patterns.
4. According to the poet, one should make a difference in life by keeping track of their unique yet interesting choices.
5. The poem expresses the speaker's thoughts about choosing varied choices in life.
6. By juxtaposing numerous concepts, the poem demonstrates contradictory decisions made by the speaker against societal norms.

7. The poet desires to be different and unique.
8. The speaker attempts to spread the concept that one should not waste one's life's opportunities.
9. Because her eyes are dark.
10. Grimm's fairy tales

Assignments

1. Write a detailed critical appreciation of the poem "Possibilities"
2. Examine the major themes of the poem and their importance in life and society.
3. What are the various unique choices that reveal the nature of the speaker?
4. Is the title "Possibilities" justified by the poem?
5. Discuss the underlying message of the poem "Possibilities".

Suggested Readings

1. *A Study Guide for Wislawa Szymborska's "Possibilities"*. Gale Cengage, 2016.
2. https://devikapanikar.com/exploration-into-individuality/
3. https://ibswede.wordpress.com/2017/02/17/possibilities-wislawa-szymborska/

BLOCK – 04

Reading Drama

Unit 1
Drama: Origins and Early Forms

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ describe in detail the literary genre of drama
- ▶ familiarize themselves with the historical phases of English drama
- ▶ engage critically and creatively with a wide range of selected texts
- ▶ acquaint themselves with the early stages in the development of drama

Prerequisites

Everybody has the urge to act out and imitate others. In both old societies and contemporary culture, in urban and rural settings, among the sophisticated and the simple, there are various forms of pretending to be found everywhere. The desire to play and perform can be found in rituals and practises of all kinds, including church practises, official state ceremonies, private family gatherings, and, of course, the theatre, where it is particularly gratified.

It is not surprising that timeless dramatic moments have marked and honoured the most common experience, as well as the most profound thinking and sacred beliefs of humankind. The reenactment of a public demonstration or other event attests to the significance of numerous such instances. Early on in the medieval drama *Everyman*, the main character is rudely and unexpectedly reminded of his mortality. As a result, the spectator is also rudely and unexpectedly reminded of this essential human experience by witnessing it represented by means of the play.

The history of what we now refer to as drama predates written history by a very long way. Drama is based on what seem to be universal human activities, and there has been many debate about which of these activities was the real inspiration for drama. The most likely explanation is that these activities mixed and evolved in innumerable diverse ways in many groups and civilizations, giving rise to the wide variety of plays and theatre-related genres that exist in the present world. The unit discusses the origin and development of English drama: the various stages through which English Drama went through before it attained the status of one of the major genres of literature, and the various factors and social tendencies which influenced the growth of the genre. The religious connection of the early forms, the growth and the influence of these forms on later development of drama are also analysed.

Keywords

Discussion

Drama is the form of composition designed for performance in the theatre in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated actions and utter the dialogues. The word 'drama' originated from the Greek word 'draein' which means 'to do' or to 'act'. Play is the common alternative name for a dramatic composition. Usually the word 'play' is used to refer to particular dramatic works while the word 'drama 'is used to refer to the form as a whole. Plays are usually meant to be performed and not to be read.

It is said that drama has three separate points of origin: namely, Greek tragedy, Greek comedy and medieval European Drama. All these three are basically related to religious ceremonies.The Greek forms are believed to have originated from the rituals held in honour of 'Dionysus', the Greek God, whereas medieval European drama has its origin in the Christian rituals commemorating the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The earliest known plays were performed in Athens during the 5th century BC as part of the festivals held in honour of Dionysus. But even less is known about the origin of Greek comedy than that of tragedy. It was awarded official status at the festival of Dionysus only in 486 BC.

The story of the birth and early development of English Drama is rather complicated, if traced in all its details. But various stages and transitions through which it passed can be clearly followed. Before the Norman Conquest there was no drama in English as such. It should be remembered that the bulk of old English writings is overshadowed by the influence of Latin Christianity. The Latin church had always feared the powerful appeal that drama made to the eye and ear, an appeal to the senses being a direct challenge to its spiritual authority. The Church had done nothing to encourage the stage. But strangely enough the mass in Latin Christianity was in reality a sacred drama and contained, at any rate, dramatic possibilities. Thus drama rose again under the shadow of Christianity.

By the time of the Roman Conquest, a form of religious drama had already established itself in France and soon found its way into England. It was the work of priests who used it as the means of conveying the truth of their religion to the illiterate masses. The Church had complete control over drama. Sometime after 900 AD, a dramatic turn was given to the services of the church in England. The old monks introduced a type of sacred and religious play. On the continent, the clergy requisitioned the most elementary kind of dramatic representations - a sort of 'tableau' to bring home to the spectators the simple truths of Christianity. The source may be traced to the early forms of drama. These dramas were performed by priests. They were in Latin and were performed within church premises. Gradually, they began to be staged outside the church in local languages. The early forms of English drama include mystery plays, miracle plays, morality plays and interludes.

4.1.1 Miracle and Mystery plays

They dealt with miraculous incidents in the lives of Saints and Martyrs. The material for the mystery plays are stories taken from the Scripture. These plays expanded the mysteries

connected with religion. As these plays grew in popularity, larger and larger crowds came to witness the performances, the stage was removed from the interior of the church to the porch first and then to the churchyard, and finally to the village green or the city street. The term mystery play is applied only to a drama based on the Bible. Laymen at the same time began to participate in performances. Also vernacular tongues, first French, and then English took the place of Latin. This religious drama in England reached its height in the 14th century. After the festivals in summer, Miracle plays were performed in nearly all large towns. Gradually, these evolved into complete plays which were written in English instead of Latin. The miracle plays written in England are of unknown authorship.

They are also known as 'Corpus Christi' plays since they were performed on the day of the Corpus Christi feast (sixty days after Easter). These Corpus Christi plays were also known as "collective mysteries", representing crucial events in the biblical history of mankind from the fall of man to man's redemption. Their performances were arranged by the trading guilds of different towns. Four of these cycles are The Chester Cycle of 25 plays, The Coventry Cycle of 42 plays, The Wakefield Cycle of 31 plays and The York Cycle of 48 plays. Mystery plays were often colloquial and numerous. These religious performances lasted well into the 16th century. *Noah's Ark* and *The Last Supper* are two famous Mystery Plays.

The Towneley or Wakefield cycle belongs almost to the same date. They are thirty-two in number, and five of them correspond to five in the York cycle. The comic and realistic elements are more highly developed in these plays. A typical example is the farcical episode in the scene of the visit of the shepherds to Bethlehem, and we find how a certain Mak puts the simple shepherds to sleep by using a pill, steals a sheep and passes it off as a baby to which his wife Gyll has lately given birth, and that when Mak's fraud is discovered and commotion follows, an angel appears singing 'Gloria in Excelsis'. The Chester plays are twenty-five in number. They acted at Whitsuntide instead of Corpus Christi. The Chester plays, rather than any other cycle, kept the object of religious instruction steadily in view. The Coventry cycle numbers forty-two plays. They are connected with Coventry by a doubtful tradition, and they were performed by a company of strolling players. Abstract personifications are introduced in the Coventry plays; so there are such characters as Veritas Misericordia, Justiyia, Pax, etc. The Coventry plays are evidently of a later date, and the feature of abstract personifications links the cycle with the earlier Moralities.

These plays continued to be performed till the close of the sixteenth century. The last performance of the York plays was in 1579. We have mentioned the pageants above. The pageants may be described as a moving play-house. It was a high scaffold with two rooms, a higher and a lower, upon four wheels. This lower room served as the green room and the higher one served as a stage, being all open on the top, so that spectators might hear and see everything. They played all along the street. Thus, they began first at the Abbey gates, and when the first pageant was played, it was wheeled to the High Cross before the Mayor, and then to every street. So every street had a pageant playing before it at one time, till the pageants appointed for the day had been played. At the end of the performance all the pageants in different streets assembled at one place.

4.1.2 Morality Plays

The next stage in the history of English drama

is the Morality Play, which represents the intermediate stage between the Miracle Play and true drama. It consists of dramatised allegories of a representative Christian life in the plot form of a question for salvation, in which the crucial events are temptations, sinning and the climactic confrontation with death. They were didactic in nature. The characters, instead of being taken from the Bible or from the legends of the Saints, were personified abstractions. All kinds of mental or moral qualities appeared on stage as characters in the play. The general theme was the struggle for the possession of the soul or mankind between vice and virtue. The purpose was to impart a lesson for guidance through life. The performances were generally given by semi-professional actors. A later introduction was 'Vice', a humerous personification of evil taken on the comic side. *Pride of Life* and *Castle of Perseverance* are two Morality plays.

4.1.3 Interlude

Interlude was a late product of the development of the Morality play; 'interlude' in Latin means 'between the play'. It is a term applied to a variety of short stage entertainments, such as secular 'farces' and 'witty dialogues' with a religious or political point. The interlude differs from a Morality play in dealing with secular and comic subjects, and may be said to anticipate the early forms of comedy. The word interlude is used to refer to a wide variety of short stage entertainments which were performed between the courses of a feast or between the acts of a play. The form was popular during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These little dramas were performed by bands of professional actors. Among the better known interludes are John Heywoods' farces of the first half of the sixteenth century, especially *The Four P's* (1521), *Tyb, his Wife* and *Sir John the Priest*. The Interlude is considered to represent a transitional stage of development between the morality plays and the more realistic Elizabethan Comedy.

In the development of English drama, we may trace three influences: the native tradition, the Latin influence and Italian influence. In many of the works of the Latin Elizabethan playwrights, these three elements often blended. The Mystery and the Miracle, the Morality and the interlude represent the development of the native tradition. So far as Latin influence is concerned, Seneca was taken as a model of tragedy.

It was under the direct influence of the Renaissance that the English comedy and tragedy passed out of these preliminary phaces of their development into the forms of art. The first real comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister,* was written in 1515 by Nicholas Udall. He followed Latin models: his plays were divided into acts and scenes and were written in rhyming couplets. The action is clearly developed, the dialogue is lively and the plot has some substance. The first real tragedy, 'Gorboduc' was written by Sackville and Norton in 1561.

The quarter century, which followed the production of *Gorboduc*, was a period of vast experimentation in English drama. There was a conflict between those who insisted on the classical tradition and those who wanted to cater to the strong national taste of the English public. In the end, the nation won and just before William Shakespeare began his career as a playwright, the romantic form of drama was definitely established. The English drama of this period narrated tales of love, pleasure, lust, violence and bloodshed of classical masters. But there was little cohesive development in pre-Shakespearean drama. On the one hand, the Senecan or classical pattern was favoured by those who believed that really artistic drama could be created through the

faithful imitation of the ancient models. On the other hand, there was the native drama on which the classical form had little influence. The native drama was essentially a drama of action and really everything that happened was represented on the stage.

4.1.4 University Wits

The later developments of English drama are to be traced through the works of the Universities Wits – the Scholars who were fostered under the atmosphere of either Oxford or Cambridge. The University Wits completely revolutionised English drama and made it a suitable medium for the expression of the genius and temperaments of their age. They brought English drama to a point where Shakespeare began to experiment upon it. These playwrights had many things in common.They were usually actors as well as dramatists. They understood well the requirements of the stage and rightly felt the pulse of the audience. They knew that the Elizabethans were fond of stories and bold spectacle, so they revised old plays and became independent writers.

John Lyly was the leader of the University Wits. He selected classical themes and stories for the plays. He wrote not for regular dramatic companies, but for private theatres. So, his plays differ from those of other playwrights of this group. Lyly was the first to give shape to romantic comedy. His most famous plays are *Endymion*, *Love's Metamorphosis*, and *The Man in the Moon*. George Peele is another playwright belonging to this group. As a humorist, he paved the way for Shakespeare. His *The Old Wives' Tales* is the first dramatic satire in English. Another playwright, Robert Greene was a master in the art of plot construction. *Friar Bacon* and *James IV* are his best romantic comedies. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* occupies an important place in the development of English tragedy. It is a landmark in English tragedy. Christopher Marlowe was the most shining star among the University Wits. Marlowe presented tragic conflicts between good and evil in *Doctor Faustus*. His *Edward II* is the first historical play in English.

The University Wits contributed to the formation of Romantic Comedy, which blossomed forth in the hands of Shakespeare. They prepared the ground for the historical plays of Shakespeare. The early experiments in playwriting are of great importance historically because they did much to prepare the way for regular drama.

Rising from the liturgical mystery and morality plays, English drama reached its pinnacle during the Elizabethan period. Drama was the work of William Shakespeare's predecessors known as the University Wits. Shakespeare's plays follow the example set by these men. The Elizabethan drama of Shakespeare and his immediate predecessors departed from the conventions of ancient classical drama. Romantic drama makes free use of variety in theme and tone, often mixing tragic and comic scenes in the same play. It is essentially a drama of action, with nearly every incident of the play being exhibited on the stage. It employs sub-plots and under-plots besides the central theme. Shakespeare has written comedies, tragedies, romances and historical plays. His works contributed significantly to the standardisation of grammar, spelling and vocabulary. He has contributed the most remarkable tragedies and comedies of all time. He expanded the domestic potential of characterization, plot, language and genre. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare has blended tragedy and comedy together and created a new romantic tragedy genre. Shakespeare's contribution to English drama is incalculable.

Such were the beginnings of English drama that anticipated the emergence of a golden age during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when the University Wits produced brilliant plays, and William Shakespeare wrote his immortal drama raising English drama to the acme of perfection.

"Drama is the multiple art, using words, scenic effects, music, the gestures of the actors, and the organising talents of a producer" - Ifor Evans

The dramatist, more than any other artist, is dependent on the human factor and on machinery.

To the public theatre of the sixteenth century came William Shakespeare (1564-1616) as an actor, a playwright and a shareholder in the theatrical undertakings.

The Globe Theatre was established in 1599 and became the permanent headquarters of the Shakespearean theatrical company. It was the most typical playhouse of the Elizabethan Age.

Recap

▶ Drama is a collective art
▶ The Renaissance period marked the beginning of English Drama
▶ Early forms - religious themes
▶ Morality, Mystery, Miracle and Interlude
▶ The role of University Wits
▶ The influence of Seneca
▶ First English Comedy - *Ralph Roister Doister*
▶ First English Tragedy - *Gorboduc*
▶ A revenge play
▶ The Age of Shakespeare

Objective Questions

1. From which Greek word did the term *drama* originate ?
2. Name two miracle plays.
3. Name two morality plays.
4. Who were known as the University Wits?
5. Name two playwrights belonging to the group 'University Wits.'
6. Who is the author of *The Spanish Tragedy*?
7. Who wrote *Doctor Faustus*?
8. Which genres are blended in *Romeo and Juliet*?
9. Who wrote the first comedy in 1515?
10. Which is the first historical play in England?

Answers

1. 'Draein'
2. *Noah's Arc , The Last Supper*
3. *Pride and Life , Castle of Perseverance*
4. Scholars who were fostered under the atmosphere of Oxford or Cambridge.
5. John Lyly , Christopher Marlow
6. Thomas Kyd
7. Christopher Marlowe
8. Romance and Tragedy
9. Nicholas Udall
10. *Edward II*

Assignments

1. Write short notes on the following:
   (a) Miracle Plays
   (b) Morality Plays
   (c) Interlude
   (d) Early forms of drama

2. Write an essay on the origin and development of English Drama.
3. Comment on the role of the University Wits in the development of English drama.
4. What is the Seneccan Influence on English Drama?
5. Briefly discuss the contributions of William Shakespeare to English drama.

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Suggested Readings

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2. Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* . Pearson, 2008.
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Unit 2
Major Dramatic Genres

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:
- ▶ get acquainted with the literary genre of drama
- ▶ become aware of the various sub-genres of drama
- ▶ get introduced to the various features of Drama
- ▶ become prepared to watch and understand plays

Prerequisites

"Curiosity killed the cat", this innocent saying is typically on everyone's mind when they attend a play. What occurs next is a natural question to ask of any narrative form, and it will come up once the story has begun. Will it have a happy or a sad ending? Will everything turn out well? Remember the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare? No person, who watched the play, can be exempted from rethinking the end in the opposite way, Romeo and Juliet could have lived happily ever after! But what happened in the play? They both died tragically, and hence it is a tragedy. Apart from tragedies, there are many genres of drama, including comedies, tragicomedies, and many other types of plays.

Keywords

Comedy, Tragedy, Tragicomedy, Melodrama, Masque, Epic Drama, Absurd Drama, Kitchen-Sink Drama, Verse drama

Discussion

Drama, like other literary genres, has its own genres, the understanding of which will enable us to appreciate and analyse dramas in general.

4.2.1 Comedy

Comedy, in general, is a fictional work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to delight and amuse us.

The term 'Comedy' is applied to plays for the stage or to motion pictures. Comedy literally means revel-song (revel means to celebrate). It is a lighter form of drama which has a happy ending. It deals with the lighter side of life and aims at evoking our laughter. Comedy may be classical or romantic in design. 'High Comedy' is serious comedy, featuring intellectual humour derived by pointing out the follies of individuals or the inconsistencies in human nature in general. 'Low Comedy'

lacks seriousness and contains episodes of buffoonery and word play and fighting.

Comedy originated in ancient Greece. Three phases in the development of comedy have been identified : Old Comedy, Middle Comedy and New Comedy. Old Comedy, prevalent in the 5th century B.C., featured fantastic plot lines and contained buffoonery and farcical elements. A chorus was a regular element of these comedies. Aristophanes was a major writer of this form. His famous comedies are *Clouds*, *Knights* and *Frogs*. Relatively little is known about Middle Comedy which was prevalent in 4th century B.C. The major writers of Middle Comedy were Antiphanes and Elixis. The elements of satire almost disappeared from the New Comedy of 4th Century and 3rd Century B.C. These comedies featured love affairs and intrigues with a happy ending. The major writers of this form were Meander, Philemon and Diphilius. Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*(1552) is considered to be the first English comedy.

4.2.2 Tragedy

The term 'Tragedy' is applied to literary, especially to dramatic representations of serious actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist. Any play which deals with serious subject matter and which features the downfall of the protagonist can be termed a tragedy . The most distinguishing character of a tragedy is the seriousness of the subject matter and the presence of disastrous incidents. It deals with the dark side of life and aims at inspiring us with pity and awe. In it, the characters are involved in circumstances that impel them towards an unhappy fate.

More precise and detailed discussions of the tragic form properly begin with Aristotle's classic analysis in his *Poetics*. Aristotle defined tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude complete in itself" in the medium of poetic language and in the manner of dramatic rather than of narrative presentation, involving incidents arousing pity and fear, where with to accomplish the catharsis of such emotion. Catharsis means 'purgation' or 'purification'. Aristotle sets out to account for the fact that tragic representations of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed but relieved. The term 'Catharsis' has been explained in two ways. The idea is that tragic events in the play would arouse the emotions of pity and horror in the minds of the audience and the tension caused by these emotions is relieved by the end of the play. Another explanation is that it is the protagonist of the tragedy who undergoes catharsis with his remorse at his mistakes, purging him of his guilt. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero should be a man who is better than ordinary people and somebody who is neither thoroughly good nor bad. This hero is exhibited as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because he is led by his "hamartia".Hamartia or 'tragic flaw' is an imperfection in the tragic hero's character which brings about his downfall. The earliest known tragedies were performed in the dramatic festivals in Athens in the 5th century B.C .The major tragedians were of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripedes. The most notable tragedian in ancient Rome was Seneca. Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville's *Gorboduc* is considered to be the first English tragedy. The major tragedians of the Elizabethan Age include Thomas Kyd, John Webster and William Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are the most acclaimed tragedies.

Until the close of the 17th century, almost all the tragedies were written in verse. Later tragedies are written in prose. Tragedy

since World War I has also been innovative, including experimentation with new versions of ancient tragic forms. A recent tendency has been to interpret traditional tragedies, primarily in political terms, as incorporating the problems of the tragic individual, an indirect representation of contemporary social or ideological dilemmas and crises. Henrik Ibsen, Tennessse Williams, Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter are some of the great playwrights of tragedy after William Shakespeare.

4.2.3 Tragicomedy

Unlike comedy and tragedy, tragicomedy emerged a bit late. Tragicomedy, as its name implies, is half comedy and half tragedy. It is a play which mixes the elements of tragedy and comedy harmoniously. This intermingling can take place in several ways: plays featuring tragic incidents may have happy incidents or vice versa. Tragic plays can have comic subplots, etc. The term 'tragicomedy' was coined by Plautus in the prologue to his play *Amphitryon*. It was Italian playwrights of the Renaissance period who established tragicomedy as a separate genre. Although the form is primarily associated with the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, the mixing of tragedy and comedy has always been a feature of English drama.

4.2.4 Melodrama

Melodrama is a sensational dramatic piece with crude appeal to emotions and usually ending in happiness. It relies for its effect on physical action, purely theoretical language and behaviour, and naive sentiments. Melodrama was originally applied to all musical plays, including Opera. In these plays, typically the protagonists are 'flat types' – the hero is great-hearted, the heroine pure and the villain a monster of malignity. The themes depicted in melodrama are simple and without any twists. They are mostly love stories with beautiful heroines, charming heroes and scary villains. The influence of melodrama was so great that it penetrated other areas of literature and entertainment. Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Brown* and Douglass Jerrod's *Black –Eyed Susan* are examples.

4.2.5 Masque

Masque is a dramatic entertainment in which plot, character, and even to a great extent dialogues, are subordinated on the one hand to spectacular illustration and on the other to musical accompaniments. In it, the characters are deities of classical mythology, nymphs and personified abstractions like Love, Delight. Harmony, etc. The scenes are laid in ideal regions such as Olympus and Arcadia. Dances of various kinds are introduced at appropriate situations. The scenery and costumes are very elaborate. Two examples best known to modern readers are the masques within a play in the Fourth Act of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Milton's *Camus*, with songs. The 'antimasque' was a form developed by Ben Johnson. In it, the characters were grotesque and unruly. It served as a foil and counter type to the elegance, order and ceremony of the masque proper. Ben Johnson's *Oberon*, *The Hue and Cry After Cupid* are the best examples.

4.2.6 Epic Drama

Epic drama is a kind of drama introduced and developed by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht. Brecht's notion of epic drama rejected Aristotelian notions in several senses. By the word 'epic, Brecht signified primarily the attempt to emulate on stage the objectivity of the narration. He proposed the use of episodic narrative. His dramas are aimed at breaking dramatic illusions. The actors were expected

to be aware of the fact that they were merely performing a role, rather than trying to become the character while on stage. Such dramas would feature episodic plots interspersed by songs and by ironic commentary either by a chorus or a narrator. Stage machinery is never concealed, but visible to the audience, constantly reminding them that they are watching a play. Songs are used to invite the actors to step out of their roles and address themselves to the audience. Sometimes, the actors would change their roles in the middle of the play. These techniques were aimed at changing the relationship between the play and the audience. Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* is an example.

4.2.7 Absurd Drama

The term Absurd Drama is applied to a number of works in drama and prose fiction which have in common the view that the human condition is essentially absurd, and that this condition can be adequately represented only in works of literature that are themselves absurd. The ancient Roman mime plays can be seen as precursors of the absurdist drama. The most direct influence was the 'existential philosophy'. The extremely cynical mood of these works reflects a prevalent frame of mind in a Europe ravaged by two World wars. Martin Esslin first used the term 'Theatre of the Absurd' in his 1961 book of the same name to describe the works of a group of dramatists of the 1950s and 1960s. The major writers considered to be part of the movement

include Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. The most famous work of this form is Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot,* Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* and Edward Albee's *The American Dream*.

4.2.8 Kitchen-Sink Drama

Kitchen-Sink Drama is the name given to plays that depict the daily struggles of ordinary working class people. Plays in this category often deal with social issues, such as poor living conditions, lack of employment, poverty and turbulent living relationships. Many of these plays were performed on radio and television. The plays of Arnold Wesker, John Osborne and Alun Owen are associated with this form. Wesker's *The Kitchen* and *Rooms* are classic examples .

4.2.9 Verse Drama

As the name suggests, verse drama is the kind of drama which is written in verse form or in the form of a poem. Verse drama has taken as its model the Greek dramatic conventions. The concept of chorus has been used deftly in verse drama but only in the revived form of the older tradition. Many 20th century writers preferred to write verse dramas and the most important contributions were made by the Irish dramatic writers. W.B. Yeats tried his hand in verse drama. Another poet who made a deft contribution in verse drama is T.S Eliot. His *Murder in the Cathedral*, *Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party* are famous verse dramas.

The Renaissance began in Italy around the mid 14th century, slowly moving out all over Europe and reaching England around the 16th century. The Renaissance rejected religious and superstitious beliefs in favour of actual scientific experiments and logical rational thinking.

Shakespeare's first published play was *Titus Andronicus*, printed anonymously in 1594.

Recap

- ▶ Drama's divisions
- ▶ Origin of Comedy
- ▶ The aim of comedy is to amuse
- ▶ Three phases in the development of comedy - old, middle and new
- ▶ Chorus - a regular element
- ▶ Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* published in 1552 - First English Comedy
- ▶ Tragedy - Aristotle's definition in *Poetics* - Catharsis or Purgation and Tragic flaw or Hamartia
- ▶ Shakespeare's greatest tragedies - tragic comedy, half comedy, half tragedy
- ▶ Italian playwrights who established it as a separate genre
- ▶ Melodrama is a sensational dramatic piece
- ▶ Masque – dramatic entertainment – spectacular illustration and musical accompaniment
- ▶ Epic Drama developed by Bertolt Brecht
- ▶ Objectivity of narration and breaking dramatic illusion

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *Poetics*?
2. Whose play is *King Lear*?
3. Name two tragedies written by William Shakespeare.
4. What is meant by the term 'Catharsis' ?
5. Who introduced and developed 'Epic Drama'?
6. Name an epic drama written by Brecht.
7. Which philosophy directly influenced absurd dramatists?
8. Who used the term 'Theatre of the Absurd' first?
9. Who wrote *Waiting For Godot*?
10. What is Kitchen-Sink drama?
11. Who wrote *Murder in the Cathedral*?

Answers

1. Aristotle
2. William Shakespeare
3. *Hamlet, Othello*
4. 'Catharsis' means purgation
5. Bertolt Brecht
6. *Mother Courage and Her Children*
7. Existential Philosophy.
8. Martin Esslin
9. Samuel Beckett
10. Kitchen Sink Drama is the name given to plays that depict the daily struggles of the ordinary working class.
11. T.S. Eliot

Assignments

1. Write short essays ,each in about 100 words
   a. Tragedy
   b. Comedy
   c. Epic Drama
   d. Absurd Drama
2. Write an essay in about 300 words
   a. Major Dramatic genres
3. What is 'Kitchen-Sink Drama'?
4. Examine the concept of 'Catharsis'.
5. Write an essay on the various genres in English Drama.

Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
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Unit 3
Types of Comedy

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ identify the major genre of drama - comedy
- ▶ describe the various types of comedies
- ▶ develop an interest in the appreciation of comedy
- ▶ analyse comedies in general and their features in particular

Prerequisites

Comedy is a genre of drama that has been around since ancient times and has evolved significantly over the centuries. Historically, comedy was often used for social commentary, satire, and criticism of prevailing norms and conventions. Comedic plays employ various techniques to elicit laughter from audiences. Understanding the different types of comedic drama, such as romantic comedy, can help readers appreciate the complexity and richness of this genre. This unit dwells upon the divisions of comedy. The study of the various sub genres are discussed in detail to enhance the study, analysis and appreciation of the text in a better way.

Keywords

Romantic Comedy, Comedy of Humours, Comedy of Manners, Sentimental Comedy, Farce, Burlesque, Black-Comedy

Discussion

Comedy deals with the light side of life and aims at evoking our laughter. There are many divisions of comedy like Comedy of Humour, Comedy of Manners, etc.

4.3.1 Romantic Comedy

Romantic comedy was designed by Elizabethan dramatists on the model of contemporary prose romances. Such comedies usually depict a love affair that involves an idealised couple, especially a beautiful and engaging heroine. The course of this love does not run smooth, yet overcomes all difficulties to end in a happy reunion. William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* are examples.

4.3.2 Comedy of Humours

Comedy of Humours is a type of comedy developed by Ben Jonson based on the ancient psychological theory of the "Four Humours" that was still current in Jonson's time. The human character was governed by the presence of four basic humours (humour in Latin means 'liquid') in the body, namely blood, phlegm, choler or yellow bile and

melancholy in blackbile. The mixture of these humours was held to determine a person's physical condition and type of character. In Jonson's Comedy of Humours each of the major characters has a humour in excess that gives him a characteristic distortion. Jonson's *Everyman in His Humour* is considered to be a masterpiece of this genre. The Comedy of Humours was popular from the 16 th century to the 17 th century.

4.3.3 Comedy of Manners

Comedy of Manners or the Restoration Comedy deals with the relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upper class society. It relies for comic effect in large part on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue. It is specifically devoted to picturing the external details of life, the fashions of the time, its manners, its speech, and interests. The play often presents the picture of a highly artificial society where appearances matter more than reality. These plays are set in familiar places. They are remarkable for their neat, precise, witty, and lucid prose style. The Restoration Comedy is a genuine reflection of the temper, if not of the actual life, of the upper class of the nation. It has a sociological as well as literary interest. Unlike the Shakespearean comedy, which is Romantic in spirit, the Restoration Comedy is devoted, specifically to picturing the external details of life, the fashions of the time, its manners, its speech and its interests. The dramatists confirm their scenes to the familiar places and not to remote and far off places. The characters represent chiefly people of fashion. The plots of restoration comedies are mainly love intrigues. They are remarkable for a neat, precise, witty, balanced and lucid prose style.

The Restoration Comedy of Manners was shaped by native and French influences. It drew its main inspiration from the native tradition which had flourished before the closing of the theatres in 1642. In particular it was indebted to Fletcher and Ben Jonson.

4.3.3.1 Characteristics of the Restoration Comedy of Manners:

1. **Intellectual and Refined Tone:** The Restoration Comedy is conspicuous for intellectual and refined tone. It is full of vitality and moves with great pace. It is devoid of the romantic exuberance of the Romantic Comedy. It replaces emotion by wit, and poetry by clear concise prose. The lack of passion and emotion gives it polished crystal hardness.

2. **Presentation of Aristocratic London Society:** Fashionable and aristocratic life, with its sophisticated pursuit of sensuous pleasure, provided material in plenty for the authors. The single aim of this comedy is to show the upper ranks of contemporary society. The aristocratic refined society it presents is fashionable. It exposes "the follies but these are the follies of refined gentlemen and not of low characters." The Restoration Comedy depicts a small world which has a distinct territory of its own - the fashionable parks and coffee houses of the London of Charles II's times. The characters seldom move from this charming world.

3. **Sex and Licentiousness:** Sex is treated with utter (disregard for the rules of behaviour in sexual matters) frankness. The chief subject of the comedies is the intimate relations between men and women. The relation between the sexes at that time was one of great importance. There is a powerful undercurrent of intellectual honesty about the comedy of this period. It is the predominance given to this subject, and

the manner in which it is treated that makes Restoration Comedy different from any other. The restoration comedies are considered anti-social in that they represent social institutions, particularly marriage in a ridiculous light.

4. **Characters**: The characters in the Restoration Comedies are largely types, whose dispositions sufficiently indicated by a study of their name. We have Colonel Bully, Sir John Brute, Lady Bountiful, Lady Fanciful, etc. The Restoration dramatists were far more realistic.

5. **Plot**: The Restoration dramatists were interested in wit, and portrayal of manners, rather than in the movement and progression of events, the loose-knit pattern of such a plot was of a definite advantage to them. It provided a better scope for the contrast and balance of characters. Conflicts and intrigues occupy an important place in the Restoration Comedy of Manners.

6. **Wit:** A careless, frank and debonair marks the advent of the Comedy of Manners. It was an age in which the art of talking brilliantly without meaning was regarded as one of the most important social graces. No dramatist who failed to provide wit could be successful. Men of pleasure, and wit, and women of guilt, meet and clash in Restoration Comedies.

The Comedy of Manners drew its main inspiration from the native tradition which had flourished before the closing of the theatres in 1642 . It is full of vitality and moves with great pace. William Congrave is the best and finest writer of the Comedy of Manners. *The Old Bachelor* is his first play.

The Way of the World is considered as a pure Comedy of Manners noted for its flashes of wit and brilliant sparkling dialogues. The comedy of manners was revived again in the 18 th century by Oliver Goldsmith through *She Stoops to Conquer,* and Sheriden through *The Rivals,* and *The School for Scandal*. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* is another example.

4.3.4 Sentimental Comedy

Sentimental Comedy arose as a reaction to the Comedy of Manners. It is also known as 'Drama of Sensibility'. It is the representation of middle class life. Here, the virtues of public life are exhibited, and the distress rather than the faults of mankind are highlighted. The characters have plenty of sentiments and feelings. The heroes of these plays are virtuous, honourable and extremely considerate. These plays focus on pathos rather than humour. Richard Steele is considered the founder of this genre. Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* are examples.

4.3.5 Farce

Farce is a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple hearty laughter. To do so, farce employs highly exaggerated or caricatured types of characters, puts them into improbable situations, and often makes free use of sexual mix ups and broad verbal humour. The word 'farce' comes from the Latin word 'Farcire' which means 'to stuff' which was first used during the medieval age to refer to farces which were inserted into medieval religious drama. In absurd drama, farcical elements are employed to produce the effect of a universe which is not guided by reason or logic. Farce was a component in the

comic episodes of miracle plays. In English drama, farce is usually an episode in a more complex form of comedy. There are farcical elements in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Comedy of Errors* and even in tragedies such as Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

4.3.6 Burlesque

Burlesque is a piece of writing which tries to make something look ridiculous by representing it in a humorous way. It is a form of imitation which is characterised by a disparity between the subject matter and the style of the work. The purpose is to ridicule a literary work or a whole genre through imitation and hence it is related to parody, and satire. The subject matter is said to be faults rather than vices. Burlesque can be classified into 'high burlesque' and 'low burlesque'. In high burlesque, a dignified style is applied to a low subject, whereas in the low burlesque a serious subject is treated in an undignified manner. The earliest notable instance of burlesque in the English stage should be the story of Pyramus and Thisbe enacted by Bottom and his friends in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But burlesque is not limited to drama alone and it can belong to any genre.

4.3.7 Black Comedy

In Black comedy, baleful or inept characters in a nightmarish or fantastic modern world play out their roles, during which events are often comic as well as horrifying and absurd. Black humour abounds in these plays. In order to shock the audience, events like death, disease and war become sources for humour. Tragic and disturbing subjects are treated with typical amusement.

Greek comedy of the fifth century resembled tragedy in its broadest aspect. It was performed at festivals of Dionysus under the aegis of the Athenian state.The structure of comedy shows many of the characteristics features of the mature magic drama, such as 'prologue', 'parados' and 'exodus.' Elizabethan dramatists polished the comic art of their times to evolve various forms of comedy. William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a famous comedy.

Recap

- ▶ Literal meaning
- ▶ Two types - High comedy and Low comedy
- ▶ Different sub genres of comedy
- ▶ Romantic Comedy developed in the Elizabethan Age
- ▶ Central Theme - love
- ▶ Comedy of Humour governed by one character trait 'humour'
- ▶ Generally associated with Ben Jonson
- ▶ His masterpiece is *Everyman in his Humour*
- ▶ Comedy of Manners flourished during the Restoration period
- ▶ Sentimental Comedy emerged as a reaction against the Comedy of Manners

- Richard Steele is the founder.
- Farce seeks to provoke laughter.
- Burlesque is a form of imitation to ridicule a literary work or whole genre related to parody or satire.

Objective Questions

1. Who wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
2. Who developed 'Comedy of Humours'?
3. Who is the author of *Everyman in His Humour*?
4. In which period of English Literature did Comedy of Manners flourish?
5. Which Comedy is the representation of middle class life?
6. Who is the author of *The Conscious Lovers*?
7. What is Farce?
8. Who is the author of *Doctor Faustus* ?
9. What is the purpose of 'Burlesque'?
10. From which Latin word is 'farce' derived?

Answers

1. William Shakespeare
2. Ben Jonson
3. Ben Jonson
4. Restoration Period
5. Sentimental Comedy
6. Richard Steele.
7. Farce is a type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple hearty laughter
8. Christopher Marlowe
9. The purpose is to ridicule a literary work or a whole genre through Imitation.
10. Farcire

Assignments

1. Write short essays, each in about 100 words.
   a. Comedy of Manners
   b. Sentimental Comedy
   c. Burlesque

2. Briefly examine a comic play that you recently read.

3. Examine the different types of comedy in English Drama.

4. Outline the theory of four humours and its influence on the drama of Ben Jonson.

5. List the differences between 'Farce' and 'Burlesque'.

Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.

2. Drabble, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin, 1999.

3. Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* . Pearson, 2008.

4. Hudson, W.H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature*. Maple, 2012.

5. Sethuram . *A Concise Companion to Literary Form*. Emerald, 2003.

Unit 4
Types of Tragedy

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ get acquainted with the various genres of tragedy
- ▶ gain a deep understanding to analyse tragedies
- ▶ analyse the plot, characters, and themes of tragedies
- ▶ develop an awareness about the basic differences among the various sub genres

Prerequisites

Tragedy is the genre of drama in which many legendary playwrights have produced masterpieces. The ancient Greek classical models abound in masterpieces of tragedy. The Aristotelian concept of tragedy is relevant in the comprehension and appreciation of tragedies especially Shakespeare's great tragedies like *Hamlet, King Lear, Othello* and *Macbeth*. Tragedy often explores themes such as fate, free will, justice, and the human condition and seeks to evoke emotional responses such as pity and fear in the audience. Familiarity with different types of tragic drama, such as classical tragedy, revenge tragedy, and domestic tragedy, can help readers appreciate this genre's unique features and conventions. This unit gives elaborate hints about the various sub genres of tragedy.

Keywords

Revenge Tragedy, Domestic Tragedy, Heroic Drama

Discussion

The term tragedies broadly applied to literary and especially dramatic representation of serious actions, which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist. There are different divisions of tragedy like Revenge Tragedy, Domestic Tragedy and Heroic Drama.

4.4.1 Revenge Tragedy

This type of play is also called tragedy of blood, derived from Seneca's favourite material of revenge, murder, ghost, etc. The first English tragedy *Gorboduc,* by Norton and Sackville was a revenge tragedy. Revenge tragedy is the type of drama popularised by the Elizabethan playwright Thomas Kyd through his masterpiece *The Spanish Tragedy*. The subject matters of revenge tragedy are murder and the quest for revenge. It also includes the use of pretended insanity, suicide, a scheming villain, philosophic soliloquies and the sensational use of horror.

The elements of Revenge tragedy also involved the victim's ghost appearing before the protagonist and prompting him to take revenge,

the feigned or real madness of the protagonist play within the play, complex intrigue and disguises, etc. The best example in this case is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In Senecan tragedies violence always happens off stage and it is only reported, whereas in Revenge tragedies such scenes are presented on stage to satisfy the appetite of the contemporary audience for violence and horror. Shakespeare's *Othello* is one of the few tragedies which accords closely with Aristotle's basic concepts of tragedy and plot. Most Shakespearean tragedies generally depart from introducing humorous characters, incidents or scenes called comic relief, which in various ways and degrees made relevance to the plot and enriched the tragic effect. Webster's *The White Devil,* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* are examples of revenge tragedy. Some Revenge tragedies are also termed as tragedies of blood because they are filled with gross themes of violence and bloodshed.

4.4.2 Domestic Tragedy

Domestic tragedy is also termed 'Bourgeoise tragedy'. It was written in prose and presented the protagonist from the middle or lower social ranks who suffer a commonplace domestic disaster. They are distinct from the classical drama and the Renaissance drama which focused on the life of the nobility and aristocracy. Domestic tragedies depict misfortune affecting individuals and their families. The earliest known instances of domestic tragedies are some verse plays of the Elizabethan, and Jacobean age such as Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. The Domestic tragedy was revived in prose form in the eighteenth century largely due to the influence of George Lillo. His famous work is *The London Merchant*.

4.4.3 Heroic Drama

The Heroic Drama often written in rhymed couplets deals with the conflict between love and honour or love, and duty. This type of tragedy flourished during the Restoration age. This form was influenced by the conventions of French classical drama and Italian Opera. The term suggests that these plays are similar to epics in their subject matter and style. Thus, the language used is frequently bombastic. They usually feature the conflict between the hero's passionate love affair and his duty towards his nation. The place was often set in far off countries. The action often involves the fate of an Empire. The Heroic Drama was parodied in two well-known works. The Duke of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal,* and Henry Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies*.

Recap

- ▶ Definition of tragedy
- ▶ The most popular type - Revenge Tragedy
- ▶ Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* which popularised tragedy
- ▶ Shakespeare's greatest tragedy
- ▶ Domestic Tragedy - the story of a middle class protagonist
- ▶ Heroic Drama flourished during the Restoration Age
- ▶ Incidents in tragedy arouse pity and fear wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions.
- ▶ The Elizabethan era marked both the beginning and the acme of Dramatic tragedy in England.

Objective Questions

1. Name two tragedies written by William Shakespeare.
2. What are 'tragedies by blood'?
3. Name two plays written by Webster.
4. What is the theme of Domestic tragedies?
5. Which type of drama was influenced by French Classical Drama and French Opera?
6. What are the subject matters of Revenge Tragedy?
7. Which play of Tourneur is an example of Revenge Tragedy?
8. What type of language is frequently used in Heroic Drama?
9. What conflict is usually featured in Heroic Drama?
10. Which two works are well-known parodies of Heroic Drama?

Answers

1. *Hamlet*, *Othello*
2. Some tragedies are called 'tragedies by blood' because they are filled with gruesome scenes of violence and bloodshed.
3. *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*
4. Domestic tragedies depict misfortune affecting individuals and their families.

5. Heroic Drama
6. Murder and quest for revenge
7. *The Atheist's Tragedy*
8. Bombastic language
9. Conflict between hero's passionate love affair and his duty towards the nation
10. *The Rehearsal* and *The Tragedy of Tragedies*

Assignments

1. Write an essay on "Different types of tragedies" in about 300 words.
2. Critically analyse a tragedy of your choice.
3. Briefly explore the genre of Revenge Tragedies in English drama.
4. Write a short note on 'Heroic Drama'.
5. Discuss the genre of 'Domestic Tragedy' in English drama.

Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
2. Drabble, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin, 1999.
3. Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Pearson, 2008.
4. Hudson, W.H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature.* Maple, 2012.

Unit 5
One Act Plays

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

▶ identify the dramatic genre- one act play

▶ appreciate and value one act plays

▶ analyse one act plays

▶ acquire some conversational skills in English

Prerequisites

One act plays are not as popular as the other genres of drama like comedy or tragedy. When compared to other forms of drama, the reading, understanding and even staging of one act play requires less time when compared to other forms of drama. They are often used to explore complex themes and characters within a condensed timeframe. One Act Plays provide an opportunity for playwrights, directors, and actors to experiment with different styles of theatre, and for audiences to experience a wide range of stories and emotions in a single sitting. Overall, One Act Plays offer a unique and dynamic form of theatre that is both challenging and rewarding for those involved. This unit discusses the characteristics of the genre-one act plays.

Keywords

One act plays, Curtain-raiser, Precise dialogue, Addison, Steele

Discussion

The history of the evolution of English drama begins with one act plays. During the initial stages, the main aim of drama concentrated on didactic purposes. So literary enjoyment was undermined in one act plays. Instead of having the usual division of drama into acts and scenes, the one act play is a play in one act. The one act is brief and compact. It imposes several restrictions on the playwright. He cannot develop his characters and situations gradually. He must present the people and the story with a few suggestive strokes. Dialogue should be precise and pointed. Each sentence contributes something to the development of the play. "Brevity is the soul of one act play; brevity in the plot which cannot be complex, brevity in characterization which has to be immediately evident, brevity in dialogue which must be significant from the beginning to the end". It has a single main episode and is either a comedy or a pure tragedy, that time of

action being equivalent to that of representation and confined to a single place.

The one-act play is a literary genre, which captures in miniature the little world of drama that holds, as it were, "the mirror up to nature". The one-act play, which first made its appearance as a "curtain raiser" in the English theatre in the late nineteenth century, has all the constituent elements of a full-length play, and yet remains distinct from the latter in its brevity and compactness. The accelerated pace of life in the modern world has contributed to the boom and the abiding popularity of the one-act play. In the hands of some of the masters of the form, the one-act play has attained great distinction.

If the full-length play can be likened to a novel, then, to extend the analogy further, the one-act play is like a short story concentrating on a single idea or emotion. Today, most full-length plays have three acts (Shakespeare's had five) and a performance of about two-and-a-half hours. One-act plays originated as preludes to full-length plays and were presented while latecomers were still arriving for the main entertainment. Soon some of these 'curtain raisers' proved to be as interesting as what followed, occasionally receiving more acclaim from the audience. Eventually they stood on their own and became separate forms of entertainment.

During the 18th century the one act plays came to the forefront of the literary scene with a well-made revision. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele made their contributions. Later the one act play again underwent some changes and became propagandist in character. It concentrated on conveying the ideology of the ruling class or a selected section of society.

One act plays are noteworthy for their variety and power to entertain.
Famous one act plays:

Euripides	-	*Cyclops*
Moliere	-	*The Flying Doctor*
Edward Albee	-	*The Goat or who is Sylvia*
Samuel Beckett	-	*Krapp's Last Tape*
Anton Chekhov	-	*A Marriage Proposal*
Arthur Miller	-	*A Memory of Two Mondays*
Oscar Wilde	-	*Salome*
Jean Paul Sarte	-	*No Exit*

Recap

- During initial stages aim of one act play was didactic
- A play in one act
- Precise and pointed
- 'Brevity' is the soul of one act plays
- During the 18th century one act plays came to the forefront
- Contributions by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele

Objective Questions

1. What was the purpose of the one act plays in the initial stages?
2. Who made major contributions to the genre 'one act plays'?
3. To which kind of fiction can a one act play be compared to?
4. What contributed to the boom and the abiding popularity of the one-act play?
5. What originated as preludes to full-length plays?
6. Why does the one act play impose restrictions on the playwright?
7. What is the importance of dialogue in a one act play?
8. What changes occurred to one act plays in the later stages of development?
9. When did one act plays come to the forefront?
10. What can be considered the soul of the one act play?

Answers

1. Didactic
2. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele
3. A short story
4. The accelerated pace of life in the modern world
5. One act plays
6. Because of its brief and compact nature
7. Each dialogue/sentence must contribute to the development of the plot.
8. They became propagandist in nature
9. Eighteenth century
10. Brevity

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Assignments

1. Write a short essay on the major features of one-act plays.
2. Analyse a modern one-act play of your choice.
3. Explore the history of One Act plays in English drama.
4. What are the advantages of One Act plays in modern times?
5. Discuss the differences between One Act plays and full length dramas.

Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
2. Drabble, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin, 1999.
3. Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* . Pearson, 2008.
4. Hudson, W.H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature.* Maple, 2012.

Unit 6
Dramatic Devices

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ familiarise themselves with the various dramatic devices used by the playwrights
- ▶ enhance their understanding of plays and their features
- ▶ become acquainted with the various aspects by which plays become appealing
- ▶ analyse some of the predominant dramatic devices in plays

Prerequisites

Dramatic Devices are the techniques and strategies used in theatre and other forms of performance to create dramatic tension, engage audiences, and convey meaning. These devices can include a wide range of elements, such as dialogue, setting, lighting, sound effects, and stage directions. By analyzing and appreciating dramatic devices, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the art of performance and the many ways in which theatre can reflect and shape our understanding of the world.

Keywords

Soliloquy, Aside, Irony, Verbal, Dramatic devices

Discussion

4.6.1 Irony

In most of the modern critical uses of the term 'irony', it expresses the root sense of dissembling or of hiding what is actually the case, not however to deceive but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects. Irony refers to a range of literary devices which is based on a discrepancy between appearance and reality. The word irony has its root in a Greek word which means 'dissembling'. The Greek comedy featured a stock character named 'eiron' who pretended to be stupid and spoke in understatement. There are a

few varieties of irony like verbal irony and dramatic irony.

4.6.1.1 Verbal Irony

Verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is expressed. It is the simplest form of irony in which the speaker says the exact opposite of what the other person means. The irony is similar to sarcasm but it is different from sarcasm in that the intention is not to insult. In the overall situation the speaker intends a very different and often opposite attitude or evaluation. That's when Mark Antony keeps repeating that "Brutus is

an honourable man" in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, he means to convey the exact opposite meaning. A more complex instance of irony is the famous sentence with which Jane Austen opens *Pride and Prejudice*. "It is universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife". Actually, it means that a single woman is in love with a rich husband and that a rich young man is sought after by young unmarried women and their families.

4.6.1.2 Structural Irony

Structural irony is when the discrepancy in meaning is derived from a structural feature such as an unreliable narrator. Unreliable narrators are narrators who hide or do not grasp the full significance of events that they recount. Verbal irony depends on the knowledge of the speaker's ironic intention which is shared both by the speaker and the reader. On the otherhand structural irony depends on a knowledge of the author's ironic intention shared by the reader but is not intended by the speaker.

4.6.1.3 Dramatic Irony

Dramatic Irony involves the situation in which the audience or reader shares with the author the knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant. In simple terms, dramatic irony arises when the audience has the knowledge about the characters' situation that the characters themselves lack. Writers of Greek tragedy based their plots on legends whose outcome was already known to the audience, and made frequent use of this device. A classic example can be found in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, in which, Romeo finds Juliet dead and he commits suicide by drinking poison. But the audience is aware that Juliet is only asleep, having drunk a potion which will make her

look lifeless for forty-four hours.

There are other forms of irony such as cosmic and romantic irony which are more used in other literary genres, and not commonly used in dramas.

4.6.2 Soliloquy

Soliloquy is the act of talking to oneself whether silent or aloud. In drama it denotes the convention by which a character alone on stage attached to their thoughts allows the audience to know what is passing in their mind. This dramatic device is most commonly found in Elizabethan drama. It is not supposed to be heard by anyone and spoken when another actor is present on the stage. Shakespeare used this device largely, his most famous ones being found in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Dramatists continue to use soliloquy in the Restoration period and in the 18th century. With the emergence of naturalistic drama, the convention fell into disguise because naturalistic drama tried to represent reality with utmost sincerity. "To be or not to be" is a famous soliloquy from *Hamlet*.

4.6.3 Aside

Aside is a dramatic device in which a character expresses to the audience his or her thoughts or intention in a short speech which by convention is audible to the other characters on the stage. Renaissance plays use this convention to reveal the intimate thoughts of the characters. Some playwrights use this device for comic effect. Aside is not used in modern drama. Eugene O' Neill used this device to a great extent in his play *Strange Interlude*.

4.6.4 Chorus

Among the ancient Greeks, the chorus was a group of people wearing masks who sang verses while performing dance-like moments

at religious festivals. In ancient Greek drama, the chorus is a group of actors who witnesses and comments upon the action of the play. The word 'chorus' means group of dancers. It is believed that Greek tragedy evolved out of these performances. During the Elizabethan, and Jacobean age the term chorus was applied to a single person who in some plays spoke the prologue and epilogue. This character served as the playwright's vehicle for commentary on the play and for the exposition of the subject, time and setting. In some of the plays the chorus would be accompanied by a dumb show. Modern scholars use the term 'choral character' to refer to a person within the play itself who stands apart from the action and makes comments. The Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear,* and Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra* are examples. Chorus have almost disappeared from modern drama. One notable instance of the use of chorus in the twentieth century drama is T S Eliot's verse play, *Murder in the Cathedral*.

4.6.5 Imagery

Imagery is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a literary work. Imagery is used to describe or compare something so that the reader forms a picture in their mind. It is an ornate, figurative illustration, especially used by the author for particular effect.

4.6.6 Paradox

Paradox is a statement that seems to say something opposite to common sense or the truth, but which may contain a truth. Example: "more haste, less speed". It is used to draw the attention of the reader or the listener and provides emphasis. G. K Chesterton was a master of paradox. His plays abound in paradoxes which drive the readers to laughter.

4.6.7 Pathetic Fallacy

It is the attribution of human feelings and responses to inanimate things or animals, especially in art, and literature. It is a phrase invented by John Ruskin in 1856 to signify any representation of inanimate natural objects that ascribes to them human capabilities, sensations, and emotions.

4.6.8 Nemesis

Nemesis is the Greek goddess of retributive justice. Nemesis generally stands for punishment of the wicked. Nemesis is the protagonist's main enemy. The person diametrically opposes the main character values or beliefs. For example in the play *Hamlet*, Hamlet acts a nemesis for Claudius who kills his father and marries his mother. Claudius' devilness calls for immediate retribution.

Famous soliloquies of Shakespeare

"To be or not to be "- by Hamlet in *Hamlet*.
"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" - by Macbeth in *Macbeth*
"All the World is a stage"- by Jacques in *As You Like It.*

Dramatic Irony : If you are watching a movie about *The Titanic* and a character leaning on the balcony right before the ship hits the iceberg says, "It is so beautiful I could just die" - that is an example of dramatic irony.

"The police station gets robbed", a post on Facebook complains about how useless Facebook is - these are examples of situational irony.

Recap

- ▶ The purpose of irony is to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects
- ▶ Three types of irony- verbal, structural and dramatic
- ▶ In verbal irony, what the speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is expressed
- ▶ In verbal irony, the speaker says exactly the opposite of what the other person means
- ▶ Structure irony is when the discrepancy derives from a structural feature
- ▶ Dramatic irony is a situation in which the audience or reader shares with the author the knowledge of circumstances about which character is ignorant
- ▶ Soliloquy is talking to oneself whether silent or aloud
- ▶ The audience gets acquainted with what is passing in the characters mind
- ▶ In aside, a character expresses to the audience their thoughts or intention
- ▶ Chorus is a group of masked actors who would witness and comment upon the action of the play
- ▶ Choral characters are persons within the play itself who stand apart from the action

Objective Questions

1. What are the different types of irony?
2. What is the dramatic device in which the charecter talks to oneself, whether silent or aloud ?
3. In which play do you come across the famous soliloquy 'To be, or not to be '?
4. Name the dramatic device in which a character expresses to the audience his or her thoughts or intention in a short speech.
5. Name a verse drama of the 20th century.
6. What are unreliable narrators?
7. What aspect of Romeo's death is an example of dramatic irony?
8. Which dramatic device attributes human feelings and responses to things or animals?
9. What purpose does the 'choral character' serve?
10. Who is 'Nemesis' in Greek mythology?

Answers

1. Verbal, Structural and Dramatic irony
2. Soliloquy
3. *Hamlet*
4. Aside
5. *Murder in the Cathedral*
6. Narrators who hide or do not grasp the full significance of events they recount.
7. The audience is aware that he kills himself mistakenly assuming Juliet's death (she has only taken a sleeping potion).
8. Pathetic Fallacy
9. The 'choral character' stands within the play and comments on the action.
10. She is the goddess of retributive justice.

Assignments

1. Write an essay in about 100 words.

    (a) Irony
    (b) Soliloquy and Aside

2. Write a detailed note on the various dramatic devices used in drama.
3. Discuss the evolution of the chorus in English Drama.
4. What is meant by 'Paradox' in drama?
5. Write short notes on the following:
    (a) Imagery
    (b) Pathetic Fallacy
    (c) Nemesis

Suggested Readings

1. Abrams, M . H . *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Cengage, 2015.
2. Drabble, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Penguin, 1999.
3. Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* . Pearson, 2008.
4. Hudson, W.H. *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature.* Maple, 2012.
5. Sethuram . *A Concise Companion to Literary Form*. Emerald, 2003.

BLOCK - 05

Shakespearean Drama

Unit 1
William Shakespeare: Life and Works

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ acquaint themselves with the relevant period and social milieu in which Shakespeare as a writer emerged
- ▶ get a general overview of Shakespeare's personal and literary life
- ▶ obtain a familiarity with Shakespeare's oeuvre
- ▶ familiarise themselves with the general themes and styles of Shakespeare's works

Prerequisites

More than four centuries have passed since the Bard of Avon left this world, yet his literary masterpieces continue to captivate and stimulate readers' minds worldwide. The English playwright's works have been translated into over 85 languages, studied extensively in the academic curriculum, and adapted countless times for the stage and screen. Why does Shakespeare still matter? The answer is simple: his plot and themes have surpassed the test of time, resonating with readers across generations and cultures.

The enduring appeal of Shakespeare lies in his ability to capture the essence of human nature and universal emotions that transcend time and place. His works speak to us through new adaptations and interpretations, offering fresh perspectives on the timeless themes of love, power, jealousy, revenge, and ambition. For every reader, Shakespeare's characters are reflections of ourselves, and his themes strike a chord with our life experiences.

As a literature student, when you delve into the world of Shakespeare, it is essential to remember the historical context in which he lived and worked in England. Understanding his private and public life, along with the chronological order and background in which all his works were written, is crucial in comprehending his artistic choices. The external and internal factors that influenced Shakespeare, from his time's cultural and social norms to his personal experiences, shaped the complexity and beauty of his works.

Shakespeare's enduring relevance is a testament to his unparalleled artistic vision and insight into the human condition. His works continue to inspire and challenge readers, providing a timeless perspective on the joys and struggles of the human experience.

Keywords

Writer, Drama, English sonnets, Chronology

Discussion

Despite the limited biographical material available from Shakespeare's time, many details about his life, and theatrical career have been pieced together by scholars in the years following his death. Although there were no significant biographies of Shakespeare until 1709, many anecdotes, and legends circulated about him. It was Nicholas Rowe who made the initial effort to compile available information and various versions of Shakespeare's works to create a coherent narrative. His volume, *The Works of Mr William Shakespeare; Revised and Corrected,* served as a source for subsequent works by different authors until the 19th century.

5.1.1 Private Life

Shakespeare's exact date of birth remains a mystery, but April 23rd is traditionally celebrated as his birthday. The register of the Stratford parish records his baptism date as April 23, 1564, and he passed away on the same date and month in 1616. Unfortunately, no surviving records shed light on Shakespeare's childhood and education. The second public record concerning his private life is the marriage license granted to him and his wife, Anne Hathaway, on November 27, 1582. Shakespeare and Hathaway had three children: Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith.

The interval from 1585 to 1592 in Shakespeare's life is not documented, so it is known as the "lost period" and is surrounded by tales and conjectures about the writer. By the conclusion of the 16th century, Shakespeare had gained prosperity and the favour of the aristocracy, despite not holding a specific government position. We get a hint of his financial interest and its successful management from the way he invested money to buy properties in Stratford, London.

There are no surviving private or official letters from Shakespeare except one written by his friend Richard Quiney. In the letter, Quiney mentions taking a business trip from Stratford to London and needing 30 pounds. He writes to Shakespeare, a friend and fellow resident of Stratford, from the Bell Inn in Carter Lane, asking for a loan and addressing him as "To my loving good friend and countryman, Mr Wm. Shakespeare." Little is known about what happened after the letter was sent, but years later, Quiney's son, Thomas married Shakespeare's daughter, Judith, indicating a close friendship between the two families.

According to a well-known legend, Shakespeare spent the years between 1585 and 1592 in London, where he supposedly worked as a stable boy taking care of horses before he began writing for the theatre. During this time, he became acquainted with the playhouses and began his career as a playwright.

Shakespeare's last will, written on March 25, 1616, provides another personal record of the playwright. In this document, he left most of his property to his elder daughter Susanna's sons. Shakespeare's signature on the will appears shaky, suggesting that he was in poor health at the time of signing. He passed away just a month later. Shakespeare's gravestone at the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford bears the following inscription:

"Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.

Blest be the man that spares these stones,

And must be he that moves my bones."

Eventually, a monument was erected in 1623 with a Latin epitaph attributing the wisdom of Nestor, the genius of Socrates and the poetic abilities of Virgil.

5.1.1.1 Social Milieu of Shakespeare's Age

Shakespeare lived during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I, also known as the Elizabethan Era (1558-1603), and King James I, also known as the Jacobean Era (1603-1625). The Elizabethan society in which Shakespeare lived and wrote struggled to emerge from the hangover of the ideas and social structures established during the Middle Ages. The renaissance spirit was gradually permeating into the life and culture of the English people. The Queen was still considered the representative of God on earth. But unlike the Middle Ages, the Elizabethans challenged the high-handedness of the Catholic Church. Religious leaders like Martin Luther, John Calvin and so on challenged the authority of Rome. The Church of England, which King Henry VIII founded, was firmly established by the Queen.

Meanwhile, the rise of capitalism, the expansion of education and the beginning of colonialism unsettled the existing social and economic order. Colonialism and the wars fought in Europe exposed England to different cultures. London became a cosmopolitan city and the most important cultural centre, reflecting the growing prominence of England in trade, art and naval might under the Queen. London's population rose beyond its limits. The emergence of the productive merchant middle class led to an economic boom.

When Shakespeare entered the theatre, English audiences were familiar with the translated versions of the Latin comedies of Ter-ence and Plautus. At the same time, the Senecan tragedies were performed in Elizabethan universities and schools. Also, native dramatic versions in continuation with the medieval miracle plays were performed in villages, and towns until they were banned during the Queen's reign. These plays assimilated French farce, interludes by which the clowns entertained the audience, and morality plays in which abstract themes were presented. Even the Oxford and Cambridge-educated 'University Wits' (Marlowe, Kyd, Green, Peele and Lyly), who were Shakespeare's predecessors, wrote plays using and improvising the popular narrative forms. Meanwhile, English as a language was getting standardised and spreading its range. The cheap and easy accessibility to printed books led to the standardisation of the vocabulary and grammar of the language.

5.1.1.2 Shakespeare as a Writer

It was Robert Greene, one of the 'University Wits', who first mentioned Shakespeare as a playwright, though in a sarcastic tone, in his posthumously published book *A Groats-worth of Witte, Bought with a Million of Repentance* in 1592. Henry Chettle, in his 1592 published book, *Kind-Hearts Dream*, mentions Shakespeare as an established literary figure and professional playwright though nothing much is known about his beginning as a writer. He was a prominent member of Lord Chamberlain's Men, a theatre company which comprised a group of male actors. Richard Burbage was the lead actor in the company, and he played the roles of Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. By 1595, Shakespeare became the 'sharer' in the company, as he shared the profit and expenses of the company. An entry in the Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Royal Chamber prepared in March 1595 mentions the role of Shakespeare in the theatrical world of London and his prominent position as a sharer in the Lord Chamberlain's Com-

pany. He is mentioned as a payee receiving 20 pounds post the Christmas performance before Elizabeth I, the Queen. The company was shifted to the newly built Globe Theatre in 1599.

> On 29 June, 1613, an accidental cannon firing, part of Henry VIII's performance, set the Globe Theatre, made of reused wood and thatches, ablaze.

In 1603, Lord Chamberlain's Men was renamed the King's Men with the accession of James Stuart to the English throne. The company functioned successfully until the puritan parliament closed the theatres in 1642.

> Shakespeare's Globe, built on the banks of the Thames river, is a modern reconstruction of the Globe Theatre based on the structure of the destroyed theatre. It is 750 feet away from the original location of the Globe Theatre.

London was hostile towards theatres in Shakespeare's days, yet he managed to attract the patronage of the third Earl of Southampton, Henry Wriothesley. He eventually dedicated "Venus and Adonis", and "Rape of Lucrece," his first published poems, to the Earl of Southampton. Research demonstrated that he possessed extensive knowledge and was highly competent in overseeing both the theatrical productions and financial aspects of his business. His success in the industry is evident by his purchase of New Place, a grand estate in Stratford, in 1597. Despite his family residing in Stratford, he resided in London throughout his professional career.

5.1.2 Shakespeare's Works

Determining the chronological order of Shakespeare's plays is a formidable task due to the lack of recognition of playwriting as a literary pursuit during his time, resulting in incomplete or corrupted publications. Only half of his plays were published while he was alive, and these were often incomplete or flawed, known as "bad quartos".

Following Shakespeare's death, an edition of his collected works, the First Folio, was published in 1623. However, many of his manuscripts were lost in 1642 when theatres were closed, and puritans burned them. Since the publication of the First Folio, scholars and critics have attempted to establish the order and originality of his plays. Nicholas Rowe's edition of Shakespeare in the 18th century was the basis for all subsequent biographies until the 19th century. Modern scholars aim to compile a perfect and authentic text by drawing from all available sources, or by compiling different versions of the text into the same edition, dismantling the notion of an "original" text. Regardless, it is known that Shakespeare dedicated twenty years of his life to writing plays and poetry.

During the period between 1589 and 1612, Shakespeare produced 38 plays. His first play is generally considered to be *Henry VI Part I*, and his last *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. In the early years, between 1589 and 1594, he experimented with a variety of literary forms, including erotic poems such as "Venus and Adonis", courtly comedy like, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, farcical comedy such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, history plays like *Henry VI, Parts I, II,* and *III*, *Richard III*, a moral narrative poem called "The Rape of Lucrece," and a tragedy of blood in *Titus Andronicus.* During this period, he also collaborated with other authors on a play called *Sir Thomas More* and wrote some

sonnets. The theatres were closed due to the plague in 1592 and 1593, during which time Shakespeare turned to write poems. He published "Venus and Adonis" in 1593 and "The Rape of Lucrece" in 1594, which caught the attention and patronage of the third Earl of Southampton, Henry Wriothesley, to whom both poems were dedicated.

Between 1595 and 1600, we see him gradually moving out of his amateurish writing. In this period, he wrote *Love's Labor's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, King John, Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, Richard II, Henry IV- Part I and II, Henry V, Julius Caesar, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Hamlet*.

Between 1601 and 1607, Shakespeare emerged as a mature playwright writing more tragedies, exploring the darker sides of human minds and the lure of power. Major plays of this period include *All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.

Between 1608 and 1613, Shakespeare wrote later plays like *Timon of Athens, Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. It is believed that as Shakespeare approached the end of his life, he collaborated with a young playwright named John Fletcher to co-author two plays: *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

> Cardenio, a play thought to have been co-written by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, is believed to have been lost and did not withstand the test of time..

A quick look into the chronological order of Shakespeare's plays:

- *Henry VI Part I* [1589- 1590]
- *Henry VI Part II* [1590-1591]
- *Henry VI Part III* [1590-1591]
- *Richard III* [1592-1593]
- *The Comedy of Errors* [1592-1593]
- *Titus Andronicus* [1593-1594]
- *The Taming of the Shrew* [1593-1594]
- *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* [1594-1595]
- *Love's Labor Lost* [1594-1595]
- *Romeo and Juliet* [1594-1595]
- *Richard II* [1595-1596]
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [1595-1596]
- *King John* [1596-1597]
- *The Merchant of Venice* [1596-1597]
- *Henry IV Part I* [1597-1598]
- *Henry IV Part II* [1597-1598]
- *Much Ado About Nothing* [1598-1599]
- *Henry V* [1598-1599]
- *Julius Caesar* [1599-1600]
- *As You Like It* [1599-1600]
- *Twelfth Night* [1599-1600]
- *Hamlet* [1600-1601]
- *The Merry Wives of Windsor* [1600-1601]
- *Troilus and Cressida [*1601-1602*]*
- *All's Well that Ends Well* [1602-1603]
- *Measures for Measure* [1604-1605]
- *Othello* [1604-1605]
- *King Lear* [1605-1606]
- *Macbeth* [1605-1606]
- *Antony and Cleopatra [1606-1607]*
- *Coriolanus* [1607-1608]
- *Timon of Athens* [1607-1608]
- *Pericles* [1608-1609]
- *Cymbeline* [1609-1610]
- *The Winter's Tale* [1610-1611]

▶ *The Tempest* [1611-1612]

▶ *Henry VIII* [1612-1613]

▶ *The Two Noble Kinsmen* [1612-1613]

5.1.2.1 General Classification of Shakespearean Plays

Shakespeare's 38 plays are commonly classified into four categories to provide a general understanding of his themes and style, although his works often contain elements of tragedy, comedy and history. The accepted categories are History, Comedy, Tragedy and Problem Plays.

History Plays focus on the English royalty, including kings and queens, during the War of the Roses. Although these plays are not historically accurate, Shakespeare drew inspiration from political events of his time to appeal to the Elizabethan and Jacobean society. The major history plays include *Julius Caesar, Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra, Henry IV Part I, Henry V, Richard III, Richard II, Henry VIII, King John, Henry IV Part II,* and *Edward III*.

Comedy Plays in Shakespearean theatres are distinct from contemporary comedy, with specific elements and structure, such as characters overhearing conversations leading to confusion and cross-dressing. Often, the plot revolves around a moral, and some plays have dark undertones. Major comedy plays include *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It* and *The Tempest.*

Tragedy Plays are more famous and frequently performed than Shakespeare's comedies. These plays feature tragic heroes who are powerful throughout the play but meet a tragic end. Major tragedy plays include *Antony and Cleopatra, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Romeo and Juliet* and *Titus Andronicus.*

Problem Plays do not fit into the general categorisation and are classified together as a separate category. These plays include *All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure,* and *Troilus and Cressida*, and some scholars add *The Merchant of Venice, Timon of Athens,* and *Winter's Tale.* The main characters in these plays represent a social problem rather than being comedic or tragic figures.

5.1.3 Shakespeare's Sonnets:

Between the early 1590s and 1605, Shakespeare wrote and published 154 sonnets, which explore themes, such as love, time, ageing, infidelity, lust, absence and beauty. Divided into three quatrains followed by a couplet, Shakespeare's sonnets are composed of 14 lines and follow the rhyme scheme *abab cdcd efef gg,* later known as the "English sonnet."

The first 126 sonnets are addressed to a Young Man, whom the speaker ("I") loves and are the subject of much quarrelling and despair. In the first 20 sonnets, the speaker urges the Young Man to marry to preserve his beauty through his children. The remaining sonnets deal with time, beauty and love.

The Young Man is also in love with a Dark Woman, who is attractive, and the speaker is both attracted to and repelled by her. In sonnets 33 to 35, the speaker quarrels with the Young Man, and some sonnets describe the poet's loneliness in the Young Man's absence and irresponsible behaviour.

Sonnets 127 to 152 are addressed to the Dark Lady, while sonnets 79 to 86 focus on a Rival Poet who competes for the Young Man's attention. Sonnets 153 and 154 are not directly connected to the rest of the sonnets and instead focus on the god Cupid and desire.

Although there are many speculations about the characters' identities and how much they are connected to Shakespeare's real life, it is undeniable that Shakespeare's poetic persona, different from his real life, intensifies the drama in some of the sonnets.

5.1.4 Shakespeare's After Life

Shakespeare's memory lived long after his death within the theatre community. His plays remained in the repertoire of the King's Men until 1642, earning him the titles 'Swan of Avon.' and 'Bard of Avon.' In the First Folio, English poet and playwright Ben Jonson dedicated a poem titled "To the Memory of my Beloved the Author, Mr. William Shakespeare and What he Hath Left us," praising Shakespeare's natural genius. However, in his prose work *Timber, or Discoveries* (1630), Jonson criticised Shakespeare's speed of writing, using Julius Caesar as an example. Ben Jonson ridiculed Shakespeare for "never blotted out a line." Later, Jonson declared that no English author could be compared to Shakespeare and that his works stood alone in comedy. He also wrote about how Shakespeare's plays left a strong impression on Queen Elizabeth I and King James I.

Shakespeare's contributions to the English language were immense, as his writings helped standardise spellings, phrases, vocabulary and grammar. Samuel Johnson, in his *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), noted that Shakespeare had introduced thousands of words and phrases into the English language during his writing career. *The Oxford English Dictionary* attributed 3000 original words to Shakespeare's works. Phrases like "break the ice," "with bated breath," "tongue-tied," "be-all and end-all," and "there is method in my madness," all originated from Shakespeare's writings. These phrases, along with others like "in a pickle," "eaten out of house and home," "hoodwinked," "it's Greek to me," "forever and a day," "green-eyed monster," "cruel to be kind," "wild goose chase," and "to wear one's heart on one's sleeve," have become common usages in the English language that we may not even realise they originated from Shakespeare's works.

Shakespeare's influence extends far beyond the English language. His plays, written for a limited audience in a repertory theatre in the 16th and 17th centuries, have been adapted and reproduced into different languages, genres and mediums. Like Shakespeare, no other writer has managed to break national and linguistic barriers.

Recap

> ▶ Shakespeare's exact date of birth remains a mystery, but April 23rd is traditionally celebrated as his birthday.
>
> ▶ Lived during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I, also known as the Elizabethan Era (1558-1603), and King James I, also known as the Jacobean Era (1603-1625).
>
> ▶ Became a 'sharer' in the Lord Chamberlain's Men theatre company by 1595
>
> ▶ Became a successful business owner and purchased a grand estate in Stratford.
>
> ▶ Determining the chronological order of Shakespeare's plays is a formidable task.

- ▶ His plays are commonly classified into four categories: History Plays, Comedy Plays, Tragedy Plays, and Problem Plays.
- ▶ Between the early 1590s and 1605, he wrote and published 154 sonnets.
- ▶ His sonnets explore love, time, ageing, infidelity, lust, absence and beauty.
- ▶ His writings helped standardise English spelling, phrases, vocabulary and grammar.

Objective Questions

1. When is Shakespeare's birthday generally celebrated worldwide?
2. When did Shakespeare pass away?
3. Who was Shakespeare's wife?
4. Who was the new middle class that emerged during Shakespeare's life?
5. Who mentioned Shakespeare for the first time as a playwright in print?
6. Who first mentioned Shakespeare as an established literary figure and a professional playwright?
7. In which theatre company was Shakespeare a member?
8. When were the theatres shut down due to the spread of the plague in London?
9. Who was the young playwright with whom Shakespeare entered into collaboration by the end of his career?
10. How many plays were written by Shakespeare in collaboration with John Fletcher?
11. Name the plays written by Shakespeare in collaboration with John Fletcher?
12. Which sonnets are addressed to the Dark Lady?
13. Which sonnet talks about a Rival Poet?
14. Which sonnets focus on the God Cupid?
15. What was Shakespeare's nickname?
16. Who is the 'Swan of Avon'?

Answers

1. 23rd April
2. 23 April 1616
3. Anne Hathaway
4. Merchants
5. Robert Greene
6. Henry Chettle
7. Lord Chamberlain's Men

8. 1592 and 1593
9. John Fletcher
10. Two
11. Henry VIII and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*
12. Sonnet 127 to 152
13. Sonnet 79 to 86
14. Sonnet153 and 154
15. Bard of Avon
16. William Shakespeare

Assignments

1. Write a paragraph on the available data about Shakespeare's private life.
2. What were the social conditions of the age in which Shakespeare lived?
3. Prepare a summarised outline of Shakespeare's dramatic career.
4. Explain Shakespeare's Historical, Comedy, Tragedy, and Problem Plays briefly.
5. Develop a note on Shakespeare's poems.

Suggested Readings

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Unit- 2
Julius Caesar

William Shakespeare

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this unit, the learners will be able to:
- ▶ introduce themselves to a Shakespearian play and its structure
- ▶ obtain a detailed summary of the play
- ▶ identify relevant Acts and Scenes from the play
- ▶ appreciate the timelessness and mastery of Shakespeare as an author
- ▶ trace the psychological evolution of the character and relate it to contemporary issues

Prerequisites

You might have heard the phrase "you too, Brutus?" or "the fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves". Both these phrases are from the play *Julius Caesar* written by William Shakespeare. Such is the greatness of Shakespeare's writings that we unknowingly quote his works and words in our day-to-day life.

As a literature student, you are expected to be well-acquainted with William Shakespeare and his position in English literature. One of his famous works, *Julius Caesar*, was composed during 1599-1600, likely for the inaugural performance of the newly-constructed Globe Theatre by the river Thames. The play is not a historical account of the assassination of Julius Caesar but rather Shakespeare's interpretation of those events. As you read the play, pay attention to Shakespeare's portrayal of darker themes, the tragic structure of the play, and the characterisation of its cast. Additionally, take note of the cyclical nature of human history that Shakespeare illustrates, showcasing the rise and fall of powerful men.

Keywords

Julius Caesar, Tragedy, Murder, Power, Roman, History, Problem

Discussion

Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* was written between 1599 and 1600 and is known for being one of his shortest plays. It was first published in print form in the First Folio in 1623. The play is set in 44 BCE in Rome and depicts the events leading up to the assassination of Julius Caesar, a senator and statesman. At the time, Rome was transitioning from a republic to an empire, stretching from North Africa to Britain and Spain to Persia. As Rome grew stronger, infighting among the senators and military leaders created social and political unrest, threatening its existence. The citizens were divided into the plebeians, and those represented in the Senate.

Many men sought to gain power and become the ruler of Rome, but only Gaius Julius Caesar came closer. He was a statesman and army general who led the Roman army to victory in many wars, helping him become a prominent politician. The Roman Republic had a constitution to prevent any individual from attaining too much power and becoming a monarch. Caesar entered a secret political alliance with Pompey and Crassus, promising to help each other overcome the constitutional hurdles. This alliance was called the First Triumvirate. However, with Crassus's death, Pompey shifted his allegiance to the Senate, which adhered to the constitution. In the ensuing civil war, Caesar defeated Pompey in the battle of Pharsalus, ultimately leading to Pompey's death.

In 45 BCE, Caesar defied the Senate, sparking a civil war that left him unchallenged and in control of the government. However, his authoritarian government and populist reforms were not well-received by the elites and senators, who feared being oppressed and ruled by one of their own. A conspiracy led by a group of senators, including Cassius and Brutus, resulted in Caesar's assassination on March 15, 44 BCE, the Ides of March. This event sparked a series of civil wars that eventually ended with Caesar's nephew, Octavius, consolidating power and Rome becoming an empire.

5.2.1 Act and Scene Wise Summary of the Play

Act 1: Scene 1

In February 44 BC, the scene opens on an ancient Roman street where Marullus and Flavius, the tribunes of Rome appointed to protect citizens' rights, are trying to disperse a crowd. They question a few workers about their absence from work and their profession. While the first worker answers straightforwardly, the second uses puns to suggest that he is a cobbler and that they are there to see Caesar returning to Rome after a victorious war. Marullus accuses them of dishonouring Pompey's memory and asks them to seek forgiveness from the gods. Flavius suggests taking the gathering to the banks of the Tiber river to repent for disrespecting Pompey.

Later, Flavius asks Marullus for assistance in removing decorations hung on public statues to prevent Caesar from becoming a tyrant. Despite Marullus' concern about the propriety of doing so during the feast of Lupercal, Flavius insists on removing the ornamentations.

During the celebration of Caesar's victory, a stranger warns Caesar to "beware of the Ides of March" as the day falls on the 15th of the month in the Roman calendar, the final day for paying off debts. Caesar's protégé, Mark Antony, attends the public games organised to celebrate Caesar's triumph.

Act 1: Scene 2

During the feast of Lupercal, Mark Antony, a protégé of Caesar, is scheduled to participate in a race that is said to have the power to be-

stow fertility upon childless women if a holy runner touches them while running. Knowing this, Caesar, who had recently returned to Rome after his triumph over Pompey, asks his wife Calpurnia to position herself in a spot where Mark Antony will touch her during the race.

While this is happening, a soothsayer in the crowd warns Caesar to "beware of the ides of March," but Caesar ignores the caution and departs with his attendants, leaving behind Cassius and Brutus. Seizing the opportunity, Cassius probes Brutus about his feelings toward Caesar and his opinions on Caesar's increasing power. Though already troubled by these developments, Brutus is unsure what to do. Cassius attempts to exploit this by reminding Brutus of his noble lineage and pointing out that Caesar, despite his god-like status, is a mortal with human weaknesses.

As Caesar reenters amidst the crowd's cheers and the trumpets blaring, he expresses his suspicion of Cassius to Mark Antony, calling him a dangerous man who overthinks. After Caesar leaves, Brutus, Cassius, and Casca meet and discuss that Caesar was offered the crown by Mark Antony three times, but refused it each time before having an epileptic seizure and falling.

The three men go their separate ways to contemplate Caesar's growing power. In a brief monologue, Cassius reveals his plan to gain Brutus's unwavering support and involvement in their conspiracy to overthrow Caesar.

Act 1: Scene 3

The scene occurs on the street in Rome during the evening after a terrible storm. Casca and Cicero encounter each other on the street, and Cicero recounts the unnatural occurrences that had transpired earlier. He mentions an owl hooting in the middle of the marketplace

during noon and dead roses covering graves. After Cicero exits, Cassius enters the stage and interprets these unusual events as a warning from the gods about Caesar's intentions to destroy the Roman Republic. He seeks Casca's assistance in thwarting Caesar's rise to power.

Cinna, a co-conspirator, then joins Cassius and Casca on the street. Cassius urges Cinna to persuade Brutus to join the conspiracy, instructing him to throw a fabricated message through Brutus' window. At Pompey's location, the three agree to meet with other conspirators, including Trebonius, Decius Brutus, and Metellus Cimber.

Act II: Scene 1

The scene occurs in Brutus' home, specifically in his orchard. After instructing his servant, Lucius, to light a candle in his study, he departs. Subsequently, Brutus delivers one of the play's most significant soliloquies, articulating his political beliefs and the rationale behind his support for the plan to overthrow Caesar. He asserts that he possesses no personal grievances against Caesar, but rather, he is motivated by a desire to serve the common good. Despite acknowledging Caesar's virtuous character up until this point, Brutus expresses apprehension that Caesar's ascent to power may transform him into a tyrant. Therefore when he says, "think him as a serpent's egg, Which, hatched, would as his kind, grow mischievous, And kill him in the shell", he agrees with the conspirators' plot to assassinate Caesar.

After Brutus' soliloquy, Lucius, his servant, arrives with a letter acquired from a nearby window. Following this, Casca, Cassius, Decius, Trebonius, and Metellus Cimber make their entrance. Cassius proposes that they take an oath to solidify the conspiracy, but Brutus disagrees, asserting that honourable men

acting for a just cause do not require an oath. Additionally, he opposes Cassius' proposal to include Cicero in their group. Cassius argues that Mark Antony, Caesar's protégé, must be eliminated alongside Caesar. Brutus also voices his objection to this proposal, stating that they should not shed too much blood and are mere "sacrificers, but not butchers." He clarifies that their goal is to oppose the spirit of Caesar and that in "the spirit of men, there is no blood." Following this, the conspirators leave, and Brutus is left in mental turmoil.

Portia, Brutus' loving wife, enters. She has noticed "some six or seven, who did hide their faces, Even from the dark" and that Brutus has lost sleep. She is disturbed by his behaviour and demands he shares his troubles. Portia, asserting that she is the daughter of Cato and mentally strong, believes she is above ordinary women. Touched by her devotion, Brutus promises to open up to her. After Portia exits, Caius Ligarius enters, declaring his intentions to follow Brutus in his noble and honourable deed despite his recent illness.

Act II: Scene 2

Caesar opens the scene by remarking on the terrible weather and Calpurnia's nightmare in which he is killed. The setting is his house, at night during a storm with thunder and lightning. Caesar sends his servants to meet the augurers, who can interpret dreams and signs and perform sacrifices to appease the gods. Calpurnia enters and begs Caesar not to leave the house, citing her belief in omens. However, Caesar insists that mortals cannot alter the gods' plans and that death is inevitable. The servant returns and reports that the augurers have advised Caesar to stay home since the sacrificed animal had no heart. Despite Caesar's reluctance to accept this interpretation, Calpurnia finally convinces him to stay home, and she asks Mark Antony to inform the sena-

tors that Caesar is ill.
Decius enters the scene, and Caesar tells the senators that he "will not come. That is enough to satisfy the Senate." Caesar confides in Decius about Calpurnia's dream, in which "smiling Romans" dip their hands in a stream of blood flowing from his statue. Knowing Caesar's weakness for flattery, Decius interprets the dream as a sign of Rome's revival, which Caesar's blood will fuel. He also suggests that the smiling Romans seek vitality from him by dipping their hands in his blood. Decius warns Caesar that the Senate will mock him for being swayed by his wife's dream. Ashamed, Caesar decides to go to the Capitol despite Calpurnia's warnings.

All the conspirators, except Cassius and Publius, enter the scene, and the tension rises as Caesar is encircled by his enemies. Mark Antony enters late, looking tired, and Caesar teases him about his late-night partying habits. However, Brutus reminds them that the meeting is scheduled for 8 o'clock. Caesar prepares to leave for the Capitol and asks Trebonius to accompany him on some business. Trebonius agrees and privately expresses his pleasure at being closer to Caesar than his supposed "best friends." Realising that Caesar is surrounded by conspirators who pretend to be his friends, he laments on an aside that he does not have any true friends.

Act II: Scene 3

The scene's setting is a street close to the Capitol. Upon entering the scene, Artemidorus, a teacher of rhetoric and a supporter of Caesar, proceeds to read out the conspirators' names from a note he has written to Caesar. His purpose is to warn Caesar of the imminent danger. However, he debates that his survival hinges on fate favouring Caesar over the conspirators.

Act II: Scene 4

Accompanied by Lucius, Portia emerges onto the street in front of her home. She appears unsure of her actions and gives Lucius incomplete instructions regarding an errand to the Capitol. She jerks with unease in response to imagined sounds emanating from the Capitol. During her walk, she encounters a soothsayer en route to meet Caesar. Portia inquires whether he has any knowledge of a plot to assassinate Caesar. The soothsayer expresses apprehension for Caesar's safety and departs to locate him. Subsequently, Lucius is dispatched to the Capitol to deliver Portia's greetings to Brutus and retrieve any news from the area.

Act III: Scene 1

The scene commences with Caesar, Mark Antony, Lepidus, and the conspirators proceeding towards the Capitol. While en route, Caesar notices the soothsayer and remarks, "the ides of March are come." The soothsayer responds, "Aye, Caesar, but not gone." Artemidorus calls out to Caesar and implores him to read his note, which Caesar declines and proceeds into the Capitol. Meanwhile, Popilius Lena whispers to Cassius, "I wish your enterprise today may thrive." As the group enters the Capitol, Trebonius discreetly guides Mark Antony offstage to prevent him from interfering in the assassination. Metellus Cimber entreats Caesar to repeal his brother's exile, which Caesar denies. Casca, Brutus, and the others join the plea, and as their appeal intensifies, Casca stabs Caesar from behind. The conspirators take turns stabbing him, with the last blow delivered by Brutus. Caesar falls to the ground and exclaims in disbelief, "Et tu, Brute?"

The shocking event stirs spectators, and the conspirators attempt to quell them. Trebonius arrives and announces that Antony has fled. The conspirators dip their hands in Caesar's blood and vow to proceed to the marketplace, "waving [their] red weapons o'er [their] heads" and proclaiming, "Peace, freedom, and liberty!" A servant arrives with a request from Antony to meet them. Brutus grants permission, and Antony enters. Upon seeing Caesar's corpse, he bids him farewell and feigns reconciliation by shaking hands with the conspirators. Antony requests permission to deliver a eulogy for Caesar, which Cassius opposes, but Brutus permits.

The conspirators exit, leaving Antony alone with Caesar's lifeless body. Antony implores Caesar's body for forgiveness for being cordial to his murderers. He predicts that Caesar's spirit will seek retribution and cause turmoil. A servant enters with the news that Octavius Caesar is out of Rome but on his way home. Antony informs the servant that he will give a speech in the marketplace and asks him to bear witness so he can recount the event to Octavius upon his arrival. Both men exit, carrying Caesar's corpse.

Act III: Scene 2

The Forum is the setting for the opening scene where a group of people have gathered to demand explanations for Caesar's assassination. Cassius and Brutus arrive and separate the crowd; Cassius takes one group to present his arguments while Brutus addresses the others. To begin his speech, Brutus urges the audience to listen to him patiently and judge him rationally, asserting that he is an honourable man. He then provides his reasons for the murder, supported by existing documentation. The crowd is convinced and cheers him, and he encourages them to attend Mark Antony's funeral speech.

Antony enters the Forum carrying Caesar's

bleeding body and starts his speech with the famous line, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him." He acknowledges that he has Brutus' permission to deliver the funeral oration and, like Brutus, plans to base his speech on reasons. Antony refutes Brutus' accusations against Caesar and appeals to the crowd's emotions with his grief over losing his friend. He then reads Caesar's will, which promises public land and money to every citizen of Rome. The combination of Caesar's generosity and Antony's powerful rhetoric turns the crowd against the conspirators. They become a mob that burns the homes of the murderers and cremates Caesar's body with reverence.

A servant interrupts the chaos with news that Octavius has arrived in Rome and is at Caesar's home with Lepidus. Antony immediately leaves to meet with Octavius and plan their next steps. The servant informs him that Brutus and Cassius have fled.

Act III: Scene 3

The scene opens with a chaotic mob confronting Cinna, a poet who is on his way to attend Caesar's funeral. The mob demands his personal information, and he reluctantly gives his name. Upon hearing his name, the mob mistakes him for the conspirator Cinna and decides to kill him. Cinna pleads for his life and clarifies that he is a poet, not a conspirator. However, the mob declares that he will be killed for his "bad verses." They take Cinna as a captive and proclaim their plan to burn down the conspirators' homes.

Act IV: Scene 1

Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius form the Triumvirate. At the start of the scene, they convene to determine which Romans should be killed and who should be spared. Antony and Lepidus agree to the deaths of some of their close relatives. After their discussion, Antony dispatches Lepidus to retrieve Caesar's will, intending to modify its bequests and share some of their wealth. Lepidus departs.

Antony informs Octavius that Lepidus is unfit to govern Rome and suggests they use him for their benefit before seizing his power. Octavius defends Lepidus, pointing out that he has proven his bravery on the battlefield. Antony retorts that even Lepidus's horse has such qualities and that Lepidus should be trained and utilised accordingly. Antony and Octavius agree to immediately plan for the defeat of the armies of Brutus and Cassius.

Act IV: Scene 2

The scene opens in a camp near Sardis. Titinius and Pindarus, Cassius's servant, meet Brutus outside his tent and inform him of Cassius's imminent arrival. Brutus is offended by Cassius's actions and expects an explanation. Pindarus is confident that Cassius can provide a satisfactory answer. Lucilius reports that he followed all the protocols when meeting Cassius but received no warmth. Upon hearing this, Brutus remarks that Cassius may fail them if put to the test.

Cassius enters the scene with his army and accuses Brutus of wronging him. Brutus responds that he would never wrong a friend and invites Cassius to speak with him inside the tent to avoid having their armies witness their disagreement. Both leaders instruct their subordinates to take their armies away and safeguard their privacy.

Act IV: Scene 3

Cassius and Brutus are conversing inside the tent. Cassius accuses Brutus of wronging him and further accuses him of condemning Pella

for bribery despite receiving a letter in his defence. Brutus retorts that he should not have defended such a person, and he accuses him of selling offices. Furthermore, Brutus says he would "rather be a dog and bay the moon" than sell his honour for money. He also reminds Cassius of failing to send him the gold he had asked for his army. Cassius denies everything and asks Brutus to kill him, accusing him of not loving him anymore. Eventually, the two reconcile and renew their friendship.

During a conversation over drinks, Cassius, Brutus, Titinius, and Messala learn that the armies of Antony and Octavius are marching towards Philippi and have killed numerous senators, including Cicero. Messala reports Portia's suicide, which Brutus already knew but pretends to learn for the first time. Brutus suggests marching towards Philippi and confronting the enemy there, while Cassius suggests waiting for the enemy to come to them. Eventually, Cassius agrees to Brutus's plan.

After their guests leave, Brutus invites Claudius and Varro to sleep in the tent and asks Lucius to sing for him. Lucius falls asleep, and Brutus begins reading a book. However, he is interrupted by the appearance of Caesar's ghost. He asks the apparition whether it is "some god, some angel, or some devil", to which it replies that it is "thy evil spirit." The ghost terrifies him by telling him they will meet in Philippi.

Act V: Scene 1

Octavius and Antony are stationed in Philippi with their armies, waiting for the arrival of Brutus and Cassius' armies. A messenger arrives to inform them that the opposing armies are approaching. Antony requests that Octavius lead the left side, but he declines and insists on leading the right side.
When the two parties meet, they exchange insults and accusations towards each other. Octavius challenges Brutus and Cassius to fight them. Eventually, Octavius and Antony exit the scene with their armies. Cassius expresses apprehension regarding the upcoming battle. He and Brutus worry that they will never meet again. Cassius says a poignant goodbye to Brutus that; "For ever, and forever, Brutus! If we do meet again, we'll smile indeed; If not 'tis true this parting was well made".

Act V: Scene 2

Brutus sends a message to Cassius through Messala, urging him to engage the enemy immediately as he believes Octavius' army is currently vulnerable and can be defeated.

Act V: Scene 3

The scene opens with Brutus' army searching for and collecting war spoils after successfully driving back Octavius' army. However, this leaves Cassius' side of the battlefield unguarded, and Antony's army takes advantage of this to surround Cassius' troops. Seeing soldiers in the distance, Cassius asks Titinius to ride towards them and verify their identity.

Meanwhile, Cassius instructs Pindarus to climb a nearby hill and watch Titinius. Pindarus reports back that Titinius has been surrounded by joyous and shouting soldiers. Misunderstanding them as the enemy, Cassius orders Pindarus to keep his oath of obedience and kill Titinius. Pindarus reluctantly obeys and stabs Cassius to death. Cassius says thus while dying, "Caesar, thou art revenged. Even with the sword that killed thee".

When Titinius arrives on horseback, Brutus' soldiers cheer and hail him. Titinius and Messala ride in to inform Cassius of the good news that Brutus has been victorious in the battle against Octavius' army. However, upon their

arrival, they find Cassius' dead body. Messala hurries to inform Brutus of Cassius' death, while Titinius takes his own life using Cassius' sword. When Brutus arrives with Messala, Strato, Young Cato, and Lucilius, they discover Cassius and Titinius' lifeless bodies. Brutus mourns their loss and bids them a sorrowful farewell. He then exits with his remaining men to confront the enemy.

Act V: Scene 4

Brutus and his men enter the battlefield while the fighting is ongoing. He urges them to fight with courage before leaving. Tragically, Young Cato is slain, and Lucilius is captured. Mistaken for Brutus, Antony's soldiers rush to inform their commander. Upon arriving, Antony sees Lucilius as his prisoner and inquires about Brutus. Lucilius responds that Brutus is still alive and unattainable. Antony orders his guards to search for Brutus.

Act V: Scene 5

Brutus arrives on the scene accompanied by Volumnius, Clitus, Strato, and Dardanius, all weary from the battle. He asks Clitus and then Dardanius to kill him, but both refuse. Brutus confides in Volumnius that he has seen Caesar's ghost and that his time has come. When Volumnius declines to do the deed, Brutus points out that they are surrounded by the enemy and implores him to hold the sword while he runs into it. Volumnius insists it would be wrong for a friend to assist in such a manner.

The sound of the approaching enemy army is heard, and Clitus urges Brutus to flee. But Brutus bids farewell to his comrades, stating once again that his time has arrived. As his army marches ahead, Strato and Brutus remain behind. Strato takes hold of Brutus' sword, and the two men shake hands. Finally, Brutus runs onto the sword and kills himself.

Antony, Octavius, Messala, Lucilius, and others enter and discover Strato standing over Brutus' lifeless body. Octavius proclaims that he will welcome all those who fought for Brutus into his service. Antony delivers the famous farewell speech for Brutus. He begins his speech thus; "This was the noblest Roman of them all", as he believed that, while all other conspirators stabbed Caesar because of jealousy, Brutus did that for the greater good of Rome. Octavius pledges to give Brutus a dignified funeral, and the fighting comes to a halt. Octavius then orders for a celebration to be held.

Recap

- ▶ *Julius Caesar* tells the story of the events leading up to the assassination of Julius Caesar.
- ▶ In the opening scene, two tribunes of Rome attempt to disperse a crowd celebrating Caesar's return.
- ▶ During the feast of Lupercal, Caesar asks his wife to position herself to be touched by Mark Antony, while a soothsayer warns Caesar of the ides of March.
- ▶ Brutus delivers a soliloquy outlining his political beliefs and reasoning for joining the conspiracy to assassinate Caesar.

- ▶ Caesar is convinced by his wife Calpurnia and the augurers to stay home due to her nightmare about his death.
- ▶ Decius manipulates Caesar into going to the Capitol.
- ▶ The conspirators assassinate Caesar in the Capitol, with Brutus delivering the final blow.
- ▶ Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius form the Triumvirate and plan to defeat Brutus and Cassius's armies at Philippi.
- ▶ The ghost of Caesar visits Brutus.
- ▶ Brutus and Cassius prepare for battle against Octavius and Antony's armies.
- ▶ Cassius is deceived by Pindarus and dies, followed by Titinius.
- ▶ Brutus ultimately kills himself, and Antony delivers a eulogy for Brutus.

Objective Questions

1. When was Julius Caesar written?
2. Who formed the First Triumvirate?
3. When was Julius Caesar assassinated?
4. When is Ides of March according to the Roman calendar?
5. Who is Portia's father?
6. What did Caesar say to Brutus after his stabbing?
7. Who is punished by the mob for his "bad verse"?
8. Who forms the Triumvirate after Caesar's murder?
9. Who reports the suicide of Portia to Brutus?
10. Who keeps the oath of obedience to kill Cassius?
11. Who uses Cassius' sword to kill himself?

Answers

1. Between 1599 and 1600
2. Julius Caesar, Cassius and Pompey
3. 15 March, 44 BC
4. 15 March
5. Cato
6. "Et tu, Brute?"
7. Cinna, the poet
8. Antony, Lepidus and Octavius
9. Servilia
10. Pindarus
11. Titinius

Assignments

1. Write a brief note on the historical background of the play *Julius Caesar*.
2. Write a character sketch of Mark Antony, including his funeral oration.
3. Explain Act 5 of the play *Julius Caesar*.
4. Write a short essay on the different adaptations and interpretations of Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*.
5. How does Brutus justify his involvement in Caesar's murder?

Suggested Readings

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5. McCreary, W. H. "The Study Club: The Fourth Citizen in 'Julius Caesar.'" *The English Journal*, vol. 10, no. 8, 1921, pp. 476–77. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/802843.

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Unit 3
Julius Caesar - Theme and Characterisation

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this unit, the learners will be able to:
- ▶ conduct a close reading of the play *Julius Caesar*
- ▶ identify and analyse different themes of the play
- ▶ obtain an idea of the development of characters in a Shakespearean play
- ▶ appreciate the mastery of Shakespeare as a writer
- ▶ trace the relevance of the characters and themes to the contemporary world

Prerequisites

Assuming that you have some knowledge of Shakespeare's life and works, as well as the play *Julius Caesar*, this unit requires you to focus on the play's themes and characterisation. In literary studies, the theme refers to the central idea or ideas conveyed to the reader through the text. A literary text may revolve around a single theme or multiple themes. Short stories and poems are typically built, around a single theme, while novels and dramas offer the opportunity to explore various themes within a text. Often, writers explore universal ideas in their work. The theme of a play is developed through the plot, characters, their actions and interactions, dramatic devices (such as soliloquies, asides, choruses, masks, and more), as well as the theatrical props and settings. It is important to distinguish between the theme and moral of a text, as the moral is the lesson a character learns at the end of a text and falls under the theme.

Characterisation is generally understood as the way in which a character is created or depicted in a text. This may be achieved by describing physical features, mannerisms, nature, dialogues, inner thoughts, interactions with other characters, and other characters' responses. Characters are presented in a play either by directly introducing and explaining them to the audience or by allowing the audience to infer their characteristics through their thoughts, speeches, actions, and more.

Keywords

Shakespeare, Play, Themes, Characterisation, Leadership, Power, Language, Fate

Discussion

Julius Caesar is a play that is considered a tragedy, a history play, a Roman play, and a political play. Some scholars even refer to it as a problem play. Despite its political nature, Shakespeare does not offer any explicit political judgment. It is possible to draw parallels between the political shifts in *Julius Caesar* and the British context in which the play was written. When Shakespeare wrote this play, Queen Elizabeth I had consolidated monarchical power, amassing immense wealth and power at the expense of the House of Commons and the aristocracy. The Queen was sixty-six years old and had been reigning for forty years. Like Caesar, she had no natural heir, creating fear among the people that England would fall into chaos and battles for succession. Shakespeare presents his anxiety regarding this through his interpretation of an ancient incident, as he could not directly express his views and risk offending the Queen.

In essence, the play portrays a power struggle between the emerging monarchy and the republicans, culminating in the assassination of a potential monarch. While exploring the possibilities of characterisation and themes in relation to a political crisis, Shakespeare maintains a neutral stance.

5.3.1 Themes

In *Julius Caesar*, similar to other Shakespearean tragedies, the major themes are drawn from the darker aspects of human nature that arise during power struggles. Shakespeare, acting like a skilful maestro, utilises rhetorical devices and literary and dramatic devices throughout the play to convey abstract elements, such as themes, style, characterisation, and tone. The following are the primary themes:

5.3.1.1 Leadership

In 44 BC, Rome, much like England, had reached the pinnacle of its geographical expansion. The governance of Rome rested with the senators, yet military generals and politicians, such as Julius Caesar, basked in the glory and admiration of the masses. Additionally, the plebeians elected Tribunes to represent them, as seen in Act I Scene 1 of the play, where Flavius and Marullus reprimand men celebrating Caesar's return to Rome. Rome's power structure was relatively decentralised, and some senators feared Caesar's return would eventually shatter the system. As a dramatist, Shakespeare envisioned the dramatic potential of such an event.

Shakespeare uses Caesar's return to Rome to illustrate the conflict and tensions inherent in leadership. The play portrays a situation in which the ruling class loses its unity, vision, and spirit of being true Romans. Cassius invokes the glorious tradition and integrity of Rome to gain the support of the conspirators to kill Caesar. However, he uses this to satisfy his jealousy rather than to elevate Rome's glory. In this sense, all the conspirators lose their integrity as human beings and leaders.

5.3.1.2 Power

The major theme of *Julius Caesar* is the power crisis faced by a Republic undergoing a slow transition to an Empire. In the play, characters are seduced by the allure of power and compete for dominance in the emerging empire, leading to an escalation of conflict. Caesar's growing power and popularity, earned through his military victories and statesmanship, stoked fear in the minds of conspirators who worried that he would consolidate power and become a tyrant. Cassius and Brutus argue that Caesar would establish a dictatorship and will eventually

become a tyrant. Their concerns stem from their fear of losing their freedom and the power they currently hold. Brutus, a true Roman, is anxious about Rome's shift from a decentralised republic to an empire where power is concentrated in one person. In contrast, Cassius, who was secretly allied with Caesar in the Triumvirate, is envious of his growing power and popularity and fears becoming subservient to him.

5.3.1.3 Persuasion

Shakespeare delves into the potential of persuasion as a theme to create a dramatic effect in Julius Caesar. Characters are swayed by ego, pride, honour, family obligations, love, or moral duty to act. Shakespeare explores both external stimuli and internal conflict as ways to persuade characters to act. External stimuli examples include Cassius manipulating Brutus, the conspirators plotting to assassinate Caesar, Caesar planning, Calpurnia's fear, Brutus' speech, Mark Antony's oratory strategy, and the mob's ambivalence. Meanwhile, Brutus' internal conflict over whether to kill Caesar, Portia's efforts to remain composed, and the conspirators' demand for loyalty to Rome demonstrate the power of internal persuasion.

In contrast, Caesar adopts a style of persuasion to glorify himself to the Romans. He proves his courage and skill in battle and returns to Rome, where he persuades the crowd to adore him by showcasing his victory through the streets. Caesar also persuades the masses to question his ambition to become a tyrant when he dramatically refuses the crown offered to him three times.

5.3.1.4 Fate

Is one's destiny determined by their actions, or is fate unaffected by their actions? This is the dilemma that Shakespeare appears to present in *Julius Caesar* without providing a clear resolution. During Caesar's victory march, a soothsayer warns him to beware of the Ides of March. On the day of his assassination, as Caesar makes his way to the Capitol, he challenges the soothsayer that the Ides of March has arrived, but the soothsayer responds that it has not yet passed. Moments later, Caesar is killed. Shakespeare deliberately leaves the question of fate unanswered, as we, the audience, know that Caesar's pride and vanity made him susceptible to Decius' persuasion to go to the Capitol. Shakespeare portrays characters interpreting supernatural events to guide their actions, yet they also exhibit human frailties that ultimately dictate their destiny. Thus, supernatural signs are real for Shakespeare, but human behaviour is primarily responsible for determining one's fate.

5.3.1.5 Power of Language

The play *Julius Caesar* significantly emphasises speeches and arguments. Although there are violent and gruesome scenes, much of the action centres around debates and discussions. The art of oration and the ability to persuade others through language is a recurring theme throughout the play. The characters present their arguments as logical, but Antony and Cassius possess a talent for manipulating language to make their arguments appear reasonable. Antony's success in countering Brutus' reasoning for killing Caesar is a prime example.

Cassius also employs his language skills to persuade Brutus to support the conspiracy by identifying his weaknesses and arguing logically. One instance is Cassius' use of anonymous letters, which he carefully crafted to praise Brutus' devotion to Rome and Caesar's tyranny. By leaving blank spaces between lines, Cassius knew that Brutus would fill

them with his interpretations, fueled by his fear of Caesar's rise and Rome's suffering.

Similarly, Brutus logically argued in his funeral speech why Caesar deserved to die. However, he failed to recognise that the crowd was not moved by the logic presented but was swept up in the moment of passion, cheering for him to be their new leader. In contrast, Antony succeeded in touching the emotions of the crowd by expressing his grief over the loss of his dear friend. This led the public to become a mob, sparking riots and wars.

5.3.2 Characterisation

Although *Julius Caesar* is based on the ancient Roman dictator of the same name, it should not be considered a play about real historical events. Shakespeare utilised all of the characters in the play, except for Lucius, from Sir Thomas North's English translation of *Parallel Lives* by Plutarch. Originally written in Greek, this work chronicled the leaders of ancient Rome, and their stories were imbued with human qualities and intertwined to form a literary masterpiece. The characters in Julius Caesar are complex and driven by their weaknesses, with Caesar and Brutus serving as the primary figures around which the play revolves. Additionally, Cassius, his co-conspirators, and Mark Antony all play significant roles in the story.

5.3.2.1 Julius Caesar

Shakespeare creates a dramatic representation of a political and power crisis by using Julius Caesar's victorious re-entry into Rome and his potential to become a tyrant. Although Julius Caesar is not portrayed as a figure of greatness, he is presented as an ambiguous character who is sometimes superstitious, arrogant, aloof, and sometimes reasonable and

compassionate. This uncertainty in his character is enough to make the senate fear him, but he is not a cruel villain.

In the opening scene of Act I, Flavius criticises Caesar for being an ambitious person who wishes to be above all men and keep them all under his control. Antony and Casca see him as someone whose wishes should be seen as commands and fulfilled. Caesar's attitude suggests that he complies with this view. He believes he is above humans and declares he does not fear Cassius. Moments before his murder, Caesar compares himself to the gods and expresses his determination to continue as the arbitrary administrator of Roman justice. This arrogance and vanity make him ignore the signs of his impending death.

From the play's opening act, we see Caesar's superstitious nature. He asks Calphurnia to follow the superstitious belief of getting touched by a holy runner to cure her sterility. At the same time, he ignores the signs and beliefs of his wife, priests, and soothsayers and proceeds to the Capitol. By this time, Caesar has placed himself above men and mortals, and this sense of superiority clouds his judgment, making him incapable of thinking clearly.

However, Caesar's reference to his partial deafness and the episode of epileptic seizure defies his claim of being above mortals. It gives the impression of an ageing man who thinks of himself as invincible and immortal. After his murder, Caesar continues to appear in the play. Brutus and Antony talk about the spirit of Caesar, and Antony invokes the memory of Caesar's spirit, turning the crowd into a mob. Brutus sees Caesar's ghost at Sardis and Philippi, suggesting his incapability to reconcile with his moral degeneration by participating in the murder.

5.3.2.2 Brutus

Many scholars have pointed out that despite Julius Caesar being the dominating figure in the play, Brutus is the hero. He is portrayed as a naïve but honourable person committed to moral and ethical codes of conduct and is constantly fearful for his country, imagining Caesar becoming a despotic ruler. He stands for the Republican values of Rome and resists any possibility of compromise. Therefore, he justifies the murder of Caesar as being for the good of Rome.

Although his arguments are logical, he cannot judge the people of Rome and is considered an honourable man. Cassius seeks Brutus' support for the assassination due to his acceptance and reputation as a righteous man, which would give legitimacy to the murder of Caesar. However, Brutus' overemphasis on his honour blinds him to the true characters of Cassius and Antony. He underestimates the capabilities of Antony, and by allowing him to give a funeral speech, he loses control of the situation, and the crowd turns into a violent mob. Despite obvious hints, he fails to recognise Cassius' role in manipulating him through the letter.

Brutus is a man conflicted within himself, and his delayed decisions are a result of his inner moral dilemma. He takes over a month to decide whether to participate in the assassination plot. He tries to justify the murder by reasoning out Caesar's threat to the Republic and performing a ritualistic murder.

5.3.2.3 Cassius

Caesar's words about Cassius reveal his expertise in reading men's deeds and his sharp observation skills, reflected in his cunning and ability to perceive the motives of those around him in the play. He employs his keen observa-tion skills to understand Brutus and deceive him through long debates and manipulative letters, all in pursuit of his goal to assassinate Caesar.

While Cassius is jealous of Caesar's power, he fears becoming enslaved under his tyranny and will do anything to maintain his freedom. He blames the nobility of Rome for Caesar's rise to power and believes they must restrain him. Given his immense power, Cassius sees assassination as the only way to stop Caesar.

Cassius is corrupt, supporting bribery and imposing ruthless taxes to fund his army. He is highly emotional, expressing his intense hatred for Caesar in his arguments and revealing his envy of him. Upon discovering that the conspiracy has been exposed, Cassius loses control out of fear and expresses his anger in a tent at Sardis during an argument with Brutus. He contemplates suicide several times and ultimately dies to avoid being captured and humiliated by Antony and Octavius.

5.3.2.4 Mark Antony

Mark Antony is viewed as Caesar's protege in the play. Several instances indicate Caesar's admiration for Antony and portray him as a true Epicurean and hedonist. Caesar and Brutus see Antony as incapable of serious work because he is always occupied with games and pleasure-seeking activities. Antony is even more skilled at manipulation than Cassius in the play. He can deceive Caesar and Brutus, who fail to see his true nature, while Cassius can see through him and knows Antony can potentially eliminate all Republicans.

Antony is well-versed in the art of oration and the power of language. He knows how to manipulate language in a way that appeals to the sense of justice of the crowd. At Caesar's funeral speech, he successfully turns the crowd into a rioting mob. He has no moral scruples

and uses every possible means to achieve his goal. Antony is a character who needs an opportunity to emerge as a power-hungry individual. Along with Octavius, he engages in a war against Cassius and Brutus, ultimately defeating them. Cassius and Brutus both commit suicide to avoid humiliation at Antony's hands.

Recap

- ▶ *Julius Caesar* portrays a power struggle between the emerging monarchy and the republicans, culminating in the assassination of a potential monarch.
- ▶ The major themes in *Julius Caesar* are drawn from the darker aspects of human nature that arise during power struggles.
- ▶ Shakespeare uses Caesar's return to Rome to illustrate the conflict and tensions inherent in leadership.
- ▶ The play centres on the power crisis faced by a Republic transitioning into an Empire.
- ▶ Shakespeare explores the theme of persuasion in the play, utilising external stimuli such as manipulation and assassination plots.
- ▶ The author presents the dilemma of whether fate or human actions determine one's destiny.
- ▶ He places significant emphasis on speeches and debates, showcasing the art of oration and the ability to manipulate language for persuasive purposes.
- ▶ Julius Caesar as an ambiguous character, neither a hero nor a villain
- ▶ Brutus is portrayed as the hero due to his commitment to moral and ethical codes of conduct.
- ▶ Cassius as a jealous and corrupt character
- ▶ Mark Antony as Caesar's protege in the play and a skilled manipulator

Objective Questions

1. Who consolidated the monarchical power when *Julius Caesar* was written?
2. How old was the Queen when *Julius Caesar* was written?
3. What are the two themes of the play?
4. Who are the Tribune representatives in the play's Opening Scene?
5. What does the ruling class lose?
6. What was the crisis faced by the Republic of Rome during Caesar's time?
7. Who argues that Caesar will become a tyrant?
8. What do the characters usually do in the play?
9. Who translated Plutarch's Greek work on famous men of Rome into English?
10. What is the title of Sir Thomas North's English translation of Plutarch's work?

11. To whom did Caesar compare himself?
12. Who is considered the play's hero by some scholars?
13. Who can read men's deeds?
14. Who is a good observer?
15. How does Cassius die?

Answers

1. Queen Elizabeth I
2. 66 years
3. Leadership and power
4. Flavius and Marullus
5. Unity, vision and Roman spirit
6. Power struggle
7. Cassius and Brutus
8. Argument/ debate
9. Sir Thomas North
10. *Parallel Lives*
11. Gods
12. Brutus
13. Cassius
14. Cassius
15. By suicide

Assignments

1. Discuss the elements of power and leadership in the play *Julius Caesar*.
2. "Fate is a central theme in the play *Julius Caesar*". Elaborate.
3. Does language significantly impact the development of the play *Julius Caesar*? Explain.
4. Develop a character sketch of Caesar in *Julius Caesar*.
5. "Brutus is a man conflicted within himself." Discuss.

Suggested Readings

1. Bloom, Harold, ed. *Julius Caesar: Modern Critical Interpretations*. Chelsea, 1992.

2. Daniell, David, ed. *The Arden Shakespeare.* Wadsworth, 1998.

3. Greenblatt, Stephen, *Norton Shakespeare*. 3rd edition, W. W. Norton, 2015.

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7. Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*; Penguin, 1968.

Unit 4
Julius Caesar - Structure and Style

Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this unit, the learners will be able to:

- ▶ identify and analyse the structure and style of the play *Julius Caesar*
- ▶ obtain a general idea of the structure and style of a Shakespearian play
- ▶ appreciate the beauty of the play's sentence construction, syntactic structure and rhetorical devices
- ▶ identify the nature of the language Shakespeare used in the play

Prerequisites

The categorisation of *Julius Caesar* as a Shakespearian play is problematic due to its structure and style, which are ambiguous and resist classification. Additionally, the archaic language and syntax present a challenge to modern readers.

To fully appreciate and understand Shakespeare's works, it is necessary to know the Elizabethan stage and the cultural context in which they were created. It is important to recognise that these plays were intended for an audience that lived during the Elizabethan era. Therefore, approaching the play as a director would be beneficial in identifying its intended structure and style for performance on stage.

Keywords

Elizabethan stage, Actors, Audience, Verses, Style, Structure

Discussion

Julius Caesar is believed to have been written specifically for the opening of the newly built Globetheatre. Despite being Shakespeare's shortest play, it is divided into five Acts, each with its scenes. Act I has three scenes, Act II has four, Act III has three, Act IV has three, and Act V has five. To truly grasp the structure and style of the play, one must analyse it from a director's perspective, taking into account its intended audience and the context in which it was written. Scholars of Shakespeare suggest that when examining the structure and style of a play, it is important to remember that it was written with a particular audience in mind, to be performed on a specific type of stage, and with a certain group of actors in the roles.

5.4.1 Elizabethan Stage

The Globe Theatre, designed by Shakespeare and his actors after James Burbage's theatre (known as The Theatre), was the intended

venue for the performance of *Julius Caesar*. During the Elizabethan era, the stage extended into the audience and was an octagonal platform with three acting levels that the audience from three floors could view. The balconies and windows were used to replicate each acting level, allowing actors to suddenly appear and disappear in groups from different parts of the stage, thereby increasing the tempo of the performance and making it more dynamic. This stage arrangement also facilitated interaction between the audience and the actors, as they were seated around the stage at different levels. The poorest members of the audience paid the least to watch the play and stood nearest to the stage, allowing them to interact with the actors and influence the course of the play. Unlike modern productions, which rely on sophisticated visual and sound effects, Shakespearean plays rely on splendid costumes, makeup, props, and proper staging to partially imagine the play's visual and sound effects on the audience's minds.

5.4.2 The Actors

Shakespeare's theatre company comprised men and boys who acted in his plays. He specifically wrote his plays for this group of actors. Depending on who left the company, who died, or who was promoted from an apprenticeship, he would write his dramas with specific actors in mind.

Shakespeare wrote lead roles with specific actors in his company in mind. He knew their acting strengths and weaknesses and could use this knowledge to add intensity and subtlety to their characters. He also hired skilled actors from failed troops to perform smaller roles. As a result, the original actors in Shakespeare's company needed no instructions on what to do on stage, as they were familiar with his writing style and the hints in the script. To play women characters, boys were cast as ap-

prentices who were close to graduation. As a result, these women characters were portrayed without "femininity" and with no emphasis on sexual intimacy.

5.4.3 Audience

Shakespeare's plays were enjoyed by a specific group of people who frequented them. This group, like the actors, were well-versed in the hints, poetic and language devices, stage props, and settings used in the plays. They would engage with the performance and actors by offering comments or cheering. Shakespeare's use of repetition in his plays may suggest that his audience had a shorter attention span or would leave the theatre for breaks. This repetition was likely intentional to enable the audience to return to the play and follow the plot. Both commoners and aristocrats were part of the audience for Shakespeare's plays, and he included elements in his plays that would satisfy both groups.

5.4.4 Versification

Shakespeare's plays are made more beautiful by incorporating lines and verses. He is renowned for using iambic pentameter, which involves variations in metre to emphasise particular parts of the dialogue. These meter variations also serve to modulate the tempo of the dialogue and provide cues to the actors regarding their actions on stage. For instance, a sequence of shared lines necessitates a quicker delivery tempo from the actors, resulting in rapid exchanges between the characters to maintain the metrical rhythm until its completion. For example, if we take the following conversation between Brutus and Cassius in Act IV Scene 3:

> Brutus: Well, to keep our work alive.
> What do you think
> Of marching to Philippi presently
> Cassius: I do not think it is good.

Brutus: Your reason?
Cassius: This it is:
It is better that the enemy seeks us.

These lines are in an Alexandrian metre, which means a line has six feet. Here the meter demands Brutus and Cassius to speak rapidly to finish the metric division perfectly. When delivered perfectly by the characters, this metric division will create an impression among the audience that the two are at war against Antony and Octavius and are in haste to decide their next course of action.

5.4.5 Language

Julius Caesar employs a language style emphasising dialogues, speeches, arguments, sarcasm, and public passion. Shakespeare's focus in the play is on rhetoric. Despite the characters playing with words, the language is clear and straightforward. The play features carefully crafted language and logical arguments skillfully used to manipulate others. For instance, in Act I scene 2, Cassius manages to subvert Brutus' loyalty and plant the seed that will ultimately deal a disastrous blow to the Republic, using just twenty lines. Cassius employs subtle imagery, rhetorical devices,

appeals, and carefully chosen diction to gain Brutus' support.

The language used in the play is highly poetic, with rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, simile, and personification frequently used to heighten the drama and emotion of the scenes. The use of soliloquies and asides allows the audience to gain insight into the characters' innermost thoughts and motivations, while the use of dramatic irony creates tension and suspense. The play also uses repetition and parallelism to reinforce key themes and ideas.

The language used by different characters in the play reflects their social status, personality, and beliefs. For example, Caesar speaks in an exquisite and self-assured manner, reflecting his position as a powerful and revered leader. In contrast, Brutus speaks in a more measured and reflective tone, reflecting his philosophical and introspective nature. The play also includes numerous references to classical mythology and history, which help contextualise the play's events and add depth and complexity to the characters and their motivations. Overall, the language used in *Julius Caesar* is both powerful and evocative, allowing the audience to engage with the play's themes and characters on a profound level.

Recap

▶ Shortest play by Shakespeare with five Acts
▶ Written for the Elizabethan stage, actors and audience
▶ The Globe Theater was designed by Shakespeare and some of his actors.
▶ The theatre was modelled on James Burbage's theatre.
▶ The stage was an octagonal platform projecting into the audience.
▶ Audience could interact with the play and the actors.
▶ Boys played the role of women.
▶ Both aristocrats and commoners watched his plays.
▶ Verses add to the beauty of his plays.
▶ Careful use of language

Objective Questions

1. Which is the shortest play written by Shakespeare?
2. How many Acts are there in the play?
3. Who designed the Globe theatre?
4. What is considered the model of the Globe Theatre?
5. What was the shape of the Elizabethan stage?
6. How many acting levels did the stage have?
7. What allows the actors to appear immediately or appear in groups?
8. Where does the audience sit?
9. Who stands in the yard closest to the stage?
10. Who were the actors in Shakespeare's company?
11. Who played the women's roles in Shakespearian plays?
12. Who attended the theatre performances of Shakespearian plays?
13. What is the metric division used by Shakespeare generally?

Answers

1. *Julius Caesar*
2. Five
3. Shakespeare and some of his actors
4. James Burbage's "The Theatre"
5. Octagonal
6. Three
7. The three-level structure of stage
8. Around stage
9. The poor people
10. Men and boys
11. Boys
12. Both aristocrats and commoners
13. Iambic pentameter

Assignments

1. Write a short note on the stage during Shakespeare's time.
2. Write a brief essay on the actors and audience of Shakespearean plays.
3. Write a paragraph on the characteristics of language in *Julius Caesar*.
4. Discuss the significance of versification in Shakespeare's plays.
5. Write a brief account of the stage and actors during Shakespeare's time.

Suggested Readings

1. Bloom, Harold, ed. *Julius Caesar: Modern Critical Interpretations.* Chelsea, 1992.
2. Daniell, David, ed. *The Arden Shakespeare.* Wadsworth, 1998.
3. Greenblatt, Stephen, *Norton Shakespeare*. 3rd edition, W. W. Norton, 2015.
4. Shakespeare, William. *Julius Caesar*; Penguin, 1968.

Unit 5
Julius Caesar: Critical Perspectives

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:
- ▶ familiarise themselves with different approaches used for in-depth reading of a text in literary studies
- ▶ critically analyse the play *Julius Caesar*
- ▶ address the play through multiple interpretations
- ▶ prepare themselves for insightful reading of any text
- ▶ develop preliminary skills to write the analysis of a text

Prerequisites

Scholars view *Julius Caesar* as a canonical work by Shakespeare, marking a shift from English political history to themes of human existence. The play indirectly addresses the English people's anxiety about the lack of a clear successor to the ageing Queen Elizabeth. Shakespeare drew the plot from Plutarch's Greek work on the lives of noblemen, which had been translated into English in 1579.

The political turmoil depicted in *Julius Caesar* holds relevance for our modern world, and a critical analysis of the play demands a careful close reading of the text. Close reading allows us to delve beyond the surface level and uncover hidden meanings. We can identify the major issues it addresses by situating the play within its historical context. Additionally, we can examine how the play's themes resonate with contemporary issues and draw connections to our own time.

Keywords

Critical Reading, Analysis, Characters, Themes, Morality, Virtue, Betrayal

5.5.1 Introduction

Over time, a vast body of work has been produced based on Shakespeare's plays. *Julius Caesar,* in particular, has drawn the attention of scholars due to its ambiguous position as a play that could be categorised as a tragedy, history play, Roman play, or problem play. This critical analysis of the play reveals several relevant themes and concerns, including power, loyalty to leaders, monarchy, and whether killing a leader for political reasons is justifiable. Additionally, this section touches on jealousy, over-ambition, hypocrisy, and conspiracy that can be observed in the play.

One of the main debates among scholars regarding the play centres around its protagonist. While some argue that Julius Caesar is the protagonist and that the title is justified, others contend that Brutus is the main character. Caesar only appears in three of the play's eighteen scenes and speaks only 150 lines throughout the play, while his name is mentioned 219 times. Therefore, the play is more about the spirit of Caesar than the man himself. Although Brutus successfully kills Caesar, the spirit of Caesar continues to permeate the play.

Many critics believe that Julius Caesar can be divided into two parts: the first focuses on Caesar, while the second focuses on Brutus. However, the play linearly follows Caesar's life and afterlife, chronicling his rise as a leader, his death, its consequences, and return as a spirit. Dead Caesar is portrayed as more alive than the living Caesar in the play. Shakespeare successfully condenses an event that occurred over two and a half years into a play's limited time and space.

Scholars have been particularly intrigued by the two versions of Caesar presented in the play. Private Caesar is superstitious and wants his wife to stand in a spot where the holy character Antony can touch her to cure her of her sterility. There are indications of an ageing Caesar concerned about his deteriorating hearing and experiencing epileptic seizures. Meanwhile, the public Caesar is an embodiment who speaks of himself in the third person and elevates himself above other men.

The play features few female characters, and their roles are limited. Portia, Brutus's loyal and devoted wife, falls to her knees before him, pleading for him to reveal his secrets. However, later in the play, she asserts she is just as strong as any man and can face anything because she is the daughter of the noble Cato. Critics have noted that she defines herself in terms of men and wishes to be a part of the male world. Calphurnia, Caesar's wife, is confined to his home and the conventional wife's role. She is concerned about her sterility and is portrayed as an obedient wife whose life revolves around her husband. She succeeds in preventing Caesar from attending the meeting at the Capitol, although Decius later convinces him to go.

The public plays a significant role in determining the events of the play, with some scholars even arguing that the unruly public is the protagonist. Caesar, Cassius, Brutus, Antony, and others seek to gain the support and opinion of the public. Critics hold two opinions regarding the public; some view public opinion as a democratic means of maintaining balance, while others view the public as fickle and violent, turning the play into a commentary on public violence.

In the play, Shakespeare creates a Roman world, though some critics note that the citizens exhibit Elizabethan characteristics. However, the storyline, organisation of Acts and Scenes, and the lucid yet restrained flow of

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the play reflect a typical Roman attitude. The language and style of the characters reflect the Roman style, with even private conversations having a public quality used to manipulate, persuade, and gain support. Throughout the play, an emphasis is placed on Roman values and being a 'true Roman', with references to Roman rituals.

Another critical analysis suggests that the play features a theatre within a theatre, with major characters presenting their own play and striving to fulfil their historical roles. Caesar, Brutus, Antony, and others play their respective roles in their private and public endeavours, highlighting the theatricality involved in politics.

5.5.2 Lost Morality and Political Sphere in *Julius Caesar*

Julius Caesar has long been considered a timeless classic exploring politics, power, and morality themes. While many readers and audiences focus on the play's portrayal of power struggles and betrayal, it is ultimately a story about the tragedy of lost morality in the political sphere. This section depicts how pursuing power and ambition, by referring to *Julius Caesar,* can lead to the erosion of moral principles, resulting in disastrous consequences for individuals and society.

One of the most striking examples of lost morality in *Julius Caesar* is the character of Brutus. Initially, Brutus is portrayed as an honourable man motivated by a sense of duty to his country. However, he becomes increasingly consumed by his desire to rid Rome of Caesar's tyranny, and in doing so, he sacrifices his moral principles. For instance, he agrees to assassinate Caesar even though it violates his values and beliefs. Brutus' decision ultimately leads to his downfall, as he becomes embroiled in a political struggle

he cannot control.

Similarly, the character of Cassius is also an example of the loss of morality in the political sphere. Cassius is motivated by his ambition and willingness to go to great lengths to achieve his goals. He convinces Brutus to join the conspiracy against Caesar by appealing to his sense of duty, but Cassius is only interested in advancing his interests. Cassius' lack of morality is highlighted by his willingness to manipulate others for his gain, ultimately leading to his downfall when he cannot control the events he has set in motion.

Moreover, the play portrays how the pursuit of power can corrupt even the most well-intentioned individuals. This is exemplified by the character of Mark Antony, who initially appears to be a loyal friend of Caesar's. However, when Caesar is assassinated, Antony's true nature is revealed as he manipulates the Roman citizens for his gain. He delivers a powerful speech at Caesar's funeral, appealing to the crowd's emotions and stirring up a mob mentality. This manipulation ultimately leads to civil war and the downfall of many of the play's characters.

In conclusion, *Julius Caesar* is a play that explores the tragedy of lost morality in the political sphere. Through the characters of Brutus, Cassius, and Mark Antony, Shakespeare portrays how pursuing power and ambition can lead to the erosion of moral principles and the downfall of individuals and society. The play remains relevant today as it provides a cautionary tale about the dangers of political corruption and the importance of upholding moral principles in pursuing power.

5.5.3 Virtuous and Negative Aspects of Brutus' Characterisation

The story of *Julius Caesar* is a classic example of political upheaval and betrayal, where

the nobleman Marcus Brutus is torn between his loyalty to Caesar and his love for the Republic. Brutus is often depicted as a virtuous man who acted in the best interests of the Roman people. Still, his decision to join the conspiracy against Caesar ultimately leads to his downfall. In this section, we will explore whether Brutus truly is virtuous and what negative character qualities cause his destruction.

Brutus is portrayed as an idealistic and honourable man who is deeply committed to the principles of the Republic. He is a staunch believer in the rule of law, and his actions are motivated by a desire to uphold the traditions of his forefathers. Brutus is often contrasted with the other conspirators, who are motivated by personal ambition and a thirst for power. Unlike them, Brutus is willing to sacrifice his interests for the state's greater good.

Brutus' love for the Republic is also evident in his relationship with Caesar. Although he is torn between his loyalty to his friend and the Republic, Brutus ultimately decides to side with the conspirators because he believes Caesar's ambition threatens the state's stability. He fears that Caesar will become a tyrant, and he believes that his death is necessary to preserve the liberty of the Roman people.

However, Brutus' decision to join the conspiracy against Caesar is not entirely motivated by noble intentions. Throughout the play, it becomes clear that Brutus is driven by pride and desires to be seen as a hero. He is flattered by the other conspirators, who appeal to his sense of honour and persuade him that his actions are necessary for the greater good.

Moreover, Brutus' judgment is clouded by his naivete and lack of political experience. He underestimates the public's love for Caesar and fails to anticipate the consequences of his actions. He mistakenly believes that the people will welcome the conspirators as heroes and that they will be grateful for the restoration of the Republic. However, his assumptions prove to be misguided, and his actions spark a civil war that ultimately leads to the downfall of the Republic.

Brutus' failure is caused by his negative qualities, including his pride, naivete, and lack of political experience. His pride blinds him to the fact that his actions are motivated by personal ambition rather than a desire to uphold the principles of the Republic. He is also overly confident in his abilities and fails to anticipate the consequences of his actions.

Furthermore, Brutus' naivete and lack of political experience lead him to make several crucial mistakes. He underestimates the public's love for Caesar and fails to anticipate the consequences of his actions. He also fails to recognise the danger posed by Mark Antony, who uses Caesar's death to rally the people against the conspirators. His lack of political savvy and inability to gauge public opinion ultimately leads to his downfall.

In conclusion, Brutus is a complex, multifaceted, virtuous, and flawed character. While he is motivated by a sense of personal pride and a desire to be seen as a hero, he is also committed to the principles of the Republic. He genuinely believes that his actions are necessary for the greater good.

Recap

- *Julius Caesar* is ambiguous as a play.
- Major disagreement regarding who is the protagonist of the play
- Caesar is there only in three scenes in the whole play, though his name is mentioned throughout the play.
- Caesar as a private man and public politician
- Limited role of women characters
- Public opinion as determining the events in the play
- Public as democratic force and violent mob
- Roman style, language, and structure of the play
- Moral diversions and political identities of the play
- Brutus' complex and multifaceted, virtuous and flawed character.

Objective Questions

1. What is the attractive element of *Julius Caesar* for scholars?
2. In how many scenes does Caesar appear in the play?
3. How many lines does he speak in the play?
4. How many times does his name appear in the play?
5. How many years are condensed into the duration of the play?
6. Who are the two Caesars in the play?
7. How does Portia die?
8. What is the most striking example of the lost morality in *Julius Caesar*?
9. Name a character in the play who shows that pursuing power can corrupt even the most well-intentioned individuals.
10. Which character in the play genuinely believes their actions are necessary for the greater good?

Answers

Assignments

1. Write a brief note on the Roman context in the play *Julius Caesar*.
2. Loss of morality and political strifes play significant roles in *Julius Caesar*. Explain in detail.
3. Explain in detail the virtuous and negative aspects of Brutus' Characterisation.
4. Fill in the columns below with the names of Shakespearean critics and the title of their books:

Name of the critic	Title of the book

5. Discuss the role of public opinion in determining the events of the play.

Suggested Readings

1. Bloom, Harold, ed. *Julius Caesar: Modern Critical Interpretations*. Chelsea, 1992.

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3. Greenblatt, Stephen, *Norton Shakespeare.* 3rd edition, W. W. Norton, 2015.

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7. Schanzer, Ernest. "The Problem of Julius Caesar." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1955, pp. 297–308. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2866616.

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BLOCK – 06

Modern Drama

Unit 1
Introduction to Modern Drama

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners will be able to:
- ► acquire a general idea about modernism in literature
- ► obtain information regarding the origin of modern drama and its features
- ► identify the major practitioners of modern drama
- ► briefly analyse the major movements and classifications in modern drama

Prerequisites

Modern drama refers to the theatrical works that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is characterised by its departure from conventional forms and styles. Therefore, a solid understanding of modern drama's historical context is necessary to appreciate its unique features fully.

One of the essential prerequisites to studying modern drama is an understanding of the literary, cultural, and social movements that influenced its development. These movements include Symbolism, Expressionism, Futurism, Surrealism, and the Theatre of the Absurd. One should have a basic knowledge of the different types of drama, such as tragedy, comedy, and melodrama, as well as an understanding of the conventions of drama, including plot, characterisation, setting and dialogue. Besides, general knowledge of the history of drama, from ancient Greek and Roman theatre to mediaeval and Renaissance drama, will provide the learners with a broader context for understanding modern drama. In addition, a basic knowledge of literary analysis and critical thinking skills will help examine and interpret the themes, characters, and messages in modern drama.

Keywords

Drama, modern, realism, Romanticism, Absurdism, Expressionism, Impressionism

Discussion

Modern drama refers to theatrical works written and performed from the late 19th century to the present day. It is characterised by departing from traditional literary conventions and exploring new forms of expression, themes and techniques. Modern drama emerged as a response to the changing social, political, and cultural landscape of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the rise of industrialisation, urbanisation, and the emergence of new forms of media and technology.

In contrast to the structured, formulaic plays of the past, modern drama often focuses on characters' inner lives and psychologies, exploring complex human emotions, motivations and relationships. It also frequently addresses social and political issues, reflecting the concerns and tensions of its time. Some of the most influential playwrights of modern drama include Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg, Samuel Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and Harold Pinter. Their works continue to be studied and performed worldwide, profoundly impacting the development of theatre and the arts.

6.1.1 Realism in Modern English Drama

The emergence of realism in drama during the late 19th century marked a significant shift in how the theatre was perceived and practised. Realism in modern English drama refers to a mode of theatre that attempts to depict the world as it is, focusing on ordinary people's everyday experiences and struggles. This section briefly explores the origins and development of realism in modern English drama and its impact on the evolution of theatre.

The origins of realism in modern English drama can be traced back to the mid-19th century when a group of writers, artists, and thinkers began to challenge the traditional forms and conventions of literature and art. Known as the Realist movement, they sought to represent reality as it was, free from the idealism and romanticism of earlier periods.

One of the pioneers of the Realist movement was the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. His plays, such as *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), rejected the conventions of melodrama and explored the darker side of human nature. Ibsen's characters were complex and flawed, and his plays often dealt with issues, such as women's rights, social injustice, and sexual morality. Another important figure in developing realism in modern English drama was George Bernard Shaw. Shaw's plays, such as *Pygmalion* (1913) and *Saint Joan* (1923), were known for their wit and social commentary. He used his plays as a platform to express his views on politics, society, and culture, and his characters often challenged the status quo.

6.1.1.1 Characteristics of Realist Drama

Realism in modern English drama is characterised by its focus on the everyday experiences of ordinary people. The plays are set in familiar settings, such as homes, offices, and streets, and the characters are often drawn from the working or middle classes. The dialogue is naturalistic, reflecting the way people speak, and social and political issues often drive the plots.

One of the most significant examples of realism in modern English drama is Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949). The play portrays the life of Willy Loman, a struggling salesman who cannot achieve the American

Dream. Miller's play exposed the dark side of capitalism and the human cost of pursuing success. Another example of realism in modern English drama is John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956). The play focuses on the life of Jimmy Porter, a working-class man frustrated with his social and economic status. Osborne's play was a significant departure from the conventions of earlier drama, with its use of colloquial language and focus on the struggles of ordinary people.

6.1.1.2 Impact of Realism in Modern English Drama

Realism in modern English drama significantly impacted the evolution of theatre. It marked a departure from the formalism and idealism of earlier periods and a move towards a more authentic and honest portrayal of the world. Realism also provided a platform for playwrights to explore social and political issues and challenge conventional approaches towards writing plays.

Realism in modern English drama also influenced the development of other art forms, such as film and television. Using naturalistic dialogue and everyday settings became a staple of film and television drama. Many of the themes and issues explored in modern English drama continue to resonate with audiences today.

Realism in modern English drama represented a significant shift in how the theatre was perceived and practised. It provided a platform for playwrights to explore social and political issues and challenge earlier drama conventions. Realism also significantly impacted the evolution of other art forms and continues to influence theatre and popular culture today.

6.1.2 Romanticism in Modern English Drama

The Romantic era was a cultural and artistic movement that originated in Europe during the late 18th century and lasted until the mid-19th century. It emphasised individualism, emotion, imagination, and a deep connection with nature. Romanticism profoundly impacted English literature, and its influence can still be seen in modern English drama.

Like its literary counterparts, the Romantic movement also has influenced modern English drama. While many of the plays produced in the contemporary era have moved away from the traditional Romantic themes of love, passion, and nature, the Romantic influence is still present in language, characterisation and imagery.

6.1.2.1 Language

The use of language in modern English drama is one of the most apparent ways Romanticism has influenced the genre. Romantic writers sought to create a new language that could express their emotions and experiences in a way that traditional language could not. This led to a more fluid, expressive style that emphasised the use of metaphor and symbol. In modern English drama, this language style is often used to create a sense of heightened emotion or convey complex ideas and themes. Plays such as *Equus* by Peter Shaffer and *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner are notable examples of this use of language. Both plays use metaphor and symbolism to explore complex themes, such as religion, sexuality and identity.

6.1.2.2 Characterisation

Another way Romanticism has influenced modern English drama is through its approach

to characterisation. Romantic writers sought to create complex, passionate and emotional characters. They believed that the individual was the most important aspect of human existence and that the individual's inner world was just as significant as the outer world.

This approach to characterisation can be seen in modern English drama in the form of the anti-hero. The anti-hero is a character who is flawed, often morally ambiguous, and does not conform to traditional societal norms. Plays such as *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne and *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter both feature anti-heroes as their protagonists.

6.1.2.3 Imagery

Finally, Romanticism has influenced modern English drama through its use of imagery. Romantic writers believed that nature was a source of inspiration and that it could reveal profound truths about the human experience. They used nature imagery to convey emotions and ideas that were difficult to express in words.

In modern English drama, nature imagery is often used to create atmosphere or mood. Plays like *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* by Martin McDonagh and *The Ferryman* by Jez Butterworth use nature imagery to create a sense of foreboding and unease. Thus, Romanticism has significantly impacted modern English drama, shaping the language, characterisation, and imagery used in the genre. While many of the traditional themes of Romanticism have been abandoned in modern drama, the movement's influence can still be seen in how playwrights approach the creation of their works. By examining the language, characterisation, and imagery used in plays, students can gain a deeper appreciation of the artistry and complexity of modern drama and the ways in which the Romantic movement has influenced it.

6.1.3 Absurdism in Modern English Drama

Absurdism is a philosophical and literary movement that emerged in the early 20th century, challenging the fundamental assumptions of human existence. Modern English drama is a fertile ground for exploring absurdism. It often deals with the absurdity of contemporary life, alienation and despair, and the breakdown of communication and social order. This section discusses the key characteristics of absurdism in modern English drama, its origins and influences, and some of its most prominent examples.

Absurdism is often traced back to the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, who argued that human existence is fundamentally meaningless and that individuals must create meaning in a meaningless world. The absurdists, however, took this idea further, rejecting the notion that there is an inherent meaning in human existence and emphasising the world's irrationality, chaos and absurdity. Absurdism is characterised by disorientation, confusion, anxiety, and rejection of traditional forms of meaning-making, such as religion, morality and reason.

Absurdism has profoundly influenced modern English drama, especially the works of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard. Beckett's plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, are the most iconic examples of absurdism in modern English drama. They feature characters trapped in meaningless and repetitive routines, unable to communicate with each other, and struggling to find any sense of purpose or direction in their lives. Beckett's plays are often described as existentialist, and they embody the sense of absurdity and irrationality central to absurdism.

Harold Pinter's plays, such as *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming*, also explore the themes of alienation, isolation, and communication breakdown that are central to absurdism. Pinter's characters often speak in non-sequiturs, engage in power struggles and emotional manipulation, and inhabit a world of uncertainty and ambiguity. Pinter's plays often critique the social and political order, and comment on the psychological and emotional forces that shape human behaviour.

Tom Stoppard's plays, such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Arcadia* are more playful and intellectual than Beckett's or Pinter's, but they also embody the sense of absurdity. Stoppard's characters often engage in philosophical debates and intellectual puzzles. However, their discussions are ultimately futile, as they are still looking for definitive answers to the questions they are grappling with. Stoppard's plays are often seen as celebrations of the human capacity for creativity and imagination, even in the face of the absurdity and irrationality of the world.

Several literary and philosophical movements, including Surrealism, Dadaism, and Existentialism, have influenced Absurdism in modern English drama. The Surrealists, such as Salvador Dali and Andre Breton, sought to reveal the irrational and subconscious aspects of human experience, while the Dadaists, such as Marcel Duchamp and Tristan Tzara, sought to challenge the conventional norms of art and literature. The Existentialists, such as Sartre and Camus, emphasised the importance of individual choice and responsibility and the need to confront the absurdity of human existence.

Absurdism in modern English drama has also been shaped by the historical and cultural context of the 20th century, including the two world wars, the Cold War, and the social and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s.

6.1.4 Expressionism in Modern English Drama

Expressionism is a modernist movement that originated in Germany in the early 20th century. It was a reaction to the traditional forms of art and literature that dominated the era and sought to convey subjective emotions and experiences through distorted, exaggerated, and non-realistic means. Expressionism in modern English drama reflected this broader cultural trend, and was characterised by a rejection of naturalism and a focus on the inner psychology of the characters.

The roots of Expressionism in modern English drama can be traced back to the early 20th century when several playwrights began experimenting with new forms and techniques. One of the most influential figures in this movement was the Irish playwright J.M. Synge, whose play *Riders to the Sea* is often cited as a precursor to Expressionism. The play depicts the harsh lives of the people of the Aran Islands, and uses stylised language and symbolism to convey their emotions and experiences.

Another significant influence on Expressionism in modern English drama was the work of the Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov. Chekhov's plays are known for their focus on the psychological lives of the characters, and for their use of symbolism and suggestion rather than explicit action. These techniques would be adopted and expanded upon by later Expressionist playwrights.

The first Expressionist play in modern English drama is generally considered to be *Beyond the Horizon* by Eugene O'Neill, which was first performed in 1920. The play tells the story of two brothers, Robert and Andrew Mayo, who are torn between their desire for adventure and their sense of duty to their family. The

play uses Expressionist techniques, such as symbolic lighting, distorted sets, and stylised acting, to convey the characters' inner psychology.

Other notable Expressionist plays from this era include *The Hairy Ape* by O'Neill, which explores the alienation and despair of the working class, and *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell, which depicts the dehumanising effects of industrial society on women. Both plays use Expressionist techniques, such as fragmented dialogue, surreal imagery, and stylised movement to convey their themes.

One of the most influential expressionist playwrights of the era was Tennessee Williams, whose plays *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Glass Menagerie* are considered classics of modern English drama. Both plays use expressionist techniques such as symbolic lighting, dreamlike sequences, and stylised movement to convey the characters' inner lives. Williams was particularly interested in exploring themes of desire, illusion, and the human search for meaning.

Expressionism in modern English drama continued to evolve throughout the 20th century, with notable examples, including the plays of Harold Pinter, Edward Albee and David Mamet. These playwrights continued experimenting with expressionist techniques, such as non-linear narrative, fragmented dialogue and stylised movement. They used them to explore themes, such as power, sexuality, and the nature of reality.

The movement was a reaction to the traditional forms of art and literature that dominated the era, and sought to convey subjective emotions and experiences through distorted, exaggerated, and non-realistic means. A rejection of Naturalism and a focus on the inner psychology of the characters characterised

the movement. It was influenced by the work of playwrights, such as J.M. Synge, Anton Chekhov and Eugene O'Neill.

6.1.5 Impressionism in Modern English Drama

Impressionism was a revolutionary artistic movement that emerged in the late 19th century in France. It was characterised by focusing on light and colour and rejecting traditional forms and techniques. While Impressionism was primarily a movement in painting, its influence spread to other art forms, including drama. Impressionism has significantly impacted how plays are written and performed in modern English drama.

One of the key elements of Impressionism is its emphasis on the sensory experience. In painting, this meant capturing the fleeting effects of light and colour on a particular moment. In drama, it translated into a focus on the emotional impact of the moment rather than the traditional emphasis on plot and character development. Impressionist plays often explore the characters' interior lives, using language and imagery to evoke emotions and sensations.

This emphasis on sensory experience is particularly evident in the works of playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. Beckett's plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are known for their spare, minimalist dialogue and use of repetition and silence. These elements create a sense of emptiness and isolation, evoking the existential themes of the plays. Pinter's plays, such as *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming* use language and imagery to create a sense of unease and tension, emphasising the emotional impact of the moment rather than the plot.

Another key aspect of Impressionism is its rejection of traditional forms and techniques. In painting, this meant a move away from the realistic, academic style of the past. In drama, it meant a rejection of traditional plot structures and character development. Impressionist plays often have fragmented narratives and ambiguous endings, reflecting the uncertainty and chaos of modern life.

This rejection of traditional forms is evident in the works of playwrights such as Tom Stoppard and Caryl Churchill. Stoppard's plays, such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Arcadia* play with time and structure, creating a sense of disorientation and fragmentation. Churchill's plays, such as *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls* challenge traditional notions of gender and identity, using non-linear narratives and multiple characters played by a single actor to explore the complexities of modern life.

Finally, Impressionism is known for its use of light and colour. In painting, this meant capturing the effects of light on a particular moment. In drama, it translated into a focus on the visual and physical aspects of the stage. Impressionist plays often use lighting and staging to create atmosphere and mood, emphasising the audience's sensory experience.

This use of light and colour is evident in the works of playwrights such as Sarah Kane and Simon Stephens. Kane's plays, such as *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis* use stark lighting and minimal sets to create a sense of unease and disorientation. Stephens' plays, such as *Punk Rock* and *On the Shore of the Wide World* use lighting and staging to create a sense of atmosphere and mood, emphasising the emotional impact of the moment.

In conclusion, Impressionism has had a significant impact on modern English drama. Its emphasis on sensory experience, rejection of traditional forms, and use of light and colour have influenced playwrights to explore new ways of writing and performing plays. Impressionist plays challenge conventional notions of plot and character development, creating a sense of uncertainty and fragmentation that reflects the complexities of modern life.

Recap

▶ Modern drama as a departure from traditional literary conventions

▶ Modern drama explores new forms of expression, themes, and techniques.

▶ Realism aimed to represent reality as it was, with pioneers such as Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard.

▶ Realism focuses on the everyday experiences of ordinary people and the exploration of social and political issues.

▶ The Romantic movement- the use of language to convey emotion and ideas and the creation of complex anti-heroes as protagonists

▶ Absurdism embodies themes of disorientation, confusion, and the breakdown of communication and social order.

▶ Prominent examples- Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Tom Stoppard

▶ Expressionism focused on conveying subjective emotions and experiences through non-realistic means.

- ▶ Influenced by playwrights, such as Synge, Chekhov and O'Neill.
- ▶ Impressionism emphasised the sensory experience and focused on light and colour to create atmosphere and mood.

Objective Questions

1. Whose everyday life experiences are captured in the Realist dramas?
2. Which type of drama rejects the conventions of melodrama and explores the darker side of human nature?
3. Name one Realist Drama written by George Bernard Shaw.
4. Which drama portrays the life of Willy Loman, a struggling salesman who cannot achieve the American Dream?
5. Name one Romantic Drama in which the language is often used to create a sense of heightened emotion.
6. Which movement in modern drama often traces the existentialist philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus?
7. Name one example of Absurdist drama.
8. Which movement originated in Germany in the early 20th century?
9. Which play is often cited as a precursor to Expressionism?
10. Which revolutionary art movement emerged in the late 19th century in France and impacted the development of modern drama?
11. Name one play that uses stark lighting and minimal sets to create a sense of unease and disorientation.

Answers

1. Common people
2. Realist drama
3. *Pygmalion*
4. Death of a Salesman
5. *Equus* by Peter Shaffer
6. Absurdism
7. *Waiting for Godot*
8. Expressionism
9. *Riders to the Sea*
10. Impressionism
11. Blasted

Assignments

1. What characterises modern drama, and how does it differ from traditional plays?
2. Who were some influential playwrights in modern drama, and what issues did their plays often address?
3. How did realism impact modern English drama, and what were some of the characteristics of realist dramas?
4. Who are some of the most prominent playwrights associated with absurdism in modern English drama, and how do their plays embody the sense of absurdity?
5. What are some of the philosophical and literary movements that influenced absurdism in modern English drama, and how did the historical and cultural context of the 20th century shape the movement?
6. Who were some of the influential playwrights associated with expressionism in modern English drama, and how did they use expressionist techniques to convey their themes?
7. What were some of the notable expressionist plays of the era, and how did they use techniques, such as symbolism, suggestion, and stylised movement to convey their themes?
8. What is the difference between naturalism and expressionism, and how does expressionism seek to convey subjective emotions and experiences through distorted, exaggerated, and non-realistic means?

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Unit 2
A Doll's House

Henrik Ibsen

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
- ▶ acquire familiarity with the general background of Henrik Ibsen's life
- ▶ identify the phases of Henrik Ibsen's career as a playwright
- ▶ describe the predominant features of Ibsen's writing style
- ▶ detail the themes in Ibsen's plays

Prerequisites

In the final scene of the controversial play, *A Doll's House*, the protagonist Nora slams the door shut as she marches out of her husband's home. The influential critic James Gibbons Huneker wrote about this ending: "…that slammed door reverberated across the roof of the world." In other words, the play created such a great impact with its realistic style and revolutionary message that it caught the attention of the world. Henrik Ibsen, the creator of the play, is regarded as an iconoclast who changed the existing traditions of western drama.

Drama had, by Ibsen's time, become a medium for popular entertainment. The playwright broke all the rules of conventional theatre and incorporated moral analysis into his plays. By placing common people and their lives at the centre of his works, Ibsen challenged the assumptions and values of his audiences. Most mainstream theatres would not stage his plays since many of them upheld viewpoints that were scandalous at the time. In fact, new theatres had to be formed in places, such as London, Berlin, and Paris for the sole purpose of viewing Ibsen's plays.

Just as Ibsen transformed dramatic traditions, his own writing style and focus evolved over the course of his career. From attempting to write conventional plays, he shifted to writing epic dramas, and eventually to prose plays. His themes and subjects were thought-provoking, allowing his audiences to reflect on social, moral, and psychological issues. The range and novelty of Ibsen's dramas have enriched their legacy in literary history. In the current unit, we will explore the biographical and creative history of the playwright, Henrik Ibsen, who "held so firm an empire over the thinking world in modern times."

Keywords

Dramatic traditions, New drama, Realism, Moral questions, Themes, Style

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Discussion

Henrik Johan Ibsen, more popularly known by the name Henrik Ibsen, was born in 1828 in Norway to an elite aristocratic family. But the family soon went into bankruptcy, with Ibsen forced to leave school. At the age of fifteen, he joined as an apprentice to a pharmacist in a nearby town named Grimstad. At the same time, he developed an interest in plays and started writing them. At the age of eighteen, he moved to Christiania (later renamed Oslo), intending to become a college student. But he dropped this idea later and focused his full attention on writing plays.

Henrik Ibsen was influenced by Norwegian folk tales in his early periods. He followed the works of playwrights and authors, such as Henrik Wergeland, Peter Christen Asbjornsen, and Jorgen Moe ardently. At the age of 20, he wrote his first play, *Catiline*; the tragedy was composed under the pseudonym Brynjolf Bjarme but was never staged. Later on, *The Burial Mound,* his first play to be staged, drew very little attention from audiences. Despite writing and staging countless unsuccessful plays in the following years, Ibsen continued to labour towards being a playwright.

He spent the next few years as a writer, director, and producer at Det Norske theatre in Bergen, Norway. There, Ibsen was involved in the production of more than 145 plays and in the publication of five plays. However, he was not able to gain popular acceptance. Ibsen was confined to practising existing, traditional formats of plays since he was part of the theatrical institution. Soon, he went into self-imposed exile to Sorrento in Italy where he was able to write according to his will, neglecting preconceived traditions in drama.

It was after this he came up with brilliant poetic dramas, such as *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, which garnered him critical acclamation. This was followed by plays, such as *Emperor and Galilean*, *The Pillars of Society*, and *A Doll's House*, which made him international figure. In the latter stages of his career, Ibsen began to write dramas that were more introspective and focused more on the issues of the individual rather than on critiquing social and moral standards. He radically rewrote the rules of drama by infusing realism, a style that is still used today. James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and Eugene O'Neill are just a few of the playwrights and authors he influenced.

Writing in the late nineteenth century, Ibsen often exposed realistic contemporary bourgeois life to European audiences through his plays. This, quite often, invited controversies and outrages. Ibsen's characters are usually portrayed in a real-life social scenario. By creating open-ended settings for his plays, he was able to initiate discussions on the familial and social issues presented in his plays. Thus, he broke the conventional standards practised in the plays of his time and created a new direction of moral inquiry. This has garnered him the titles, 'The Father of Realism' and 'The Father of Modern Drama'.

Ibsen's career as a playwright can be broadly divided into four periods. In his early period, he wrote verse dramas based on Norwegian history. However, these plays got little attention and Ibsen was dissatisfied with the conventions of the time. He was unable to identify with any of the existing forms of drama but did not stop writing. In his second phase, which was during the 1860s and early 1870s, he wrote epic dramas, such as *Brand* and *Peer Gynt,* which gained critical acclamation. In his third phase, which was during the late 70s and early 80s, Ibsen focused his attention on writing plays that dealt with social issues. In

the fourth phase of his career as a playwright, during the 1880s and 1890s, he diverted his attention to writing symbolic plays, such as *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken*.

Ibsen's plays often addressed social issues such as political corruption and the changing role of women. They also paid attention to psychological conflicts arising from frustrated love and destructive family relationships, emphasising character over plot. Many Ibsen scholars have compared the characters and themes in his plays to his family and upbringing, with his themes frequently dealing with financial and moral dilemmas. According to biographer Michael Mayer, the playwright deviated from the theatrical norm in a variety of ways, but most notably by combining the three key innovations of "colloquial dialogue, objectivity, and plot tightness." His conception of recognisable and relatable settings, characters, and narratives for his audiences was a remarkable turning point in the history of modern drama.

6.2.1 *A Doll's House*: Summary

A Doll's House was written by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen in 1879. It was originally written in Norwegian and later translated into English. The play is considered a landmark in the history of modern drama and is one of the most performed plays in the world. It addresses issues of gender, identity, and power in the context of a 19th-century middle-class family.

The play is set in the home of Torvald Helmer, a bank manager, and his wife, Nora. Nora is a beautiful young woman devoted to her husband and children. However, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Nora is not as happy as she seems. She is burdened with a

secret debt she has been keeping from Torvald. Her relationships with the other characters in the play reveal her lack of autonomy and self-determination.

Act I of the play introduces us to the Helmer family, consisting of Torvald Helmer, a bank manager, his wife Nora, and their three children. The act opens on Christmas Eve, and Nora is shown to be busy preparing for the holiday festivities. We see Nora as a carefree and somewhat flighty woman who is more concerned with her image and reputation than with being honest with her husband. We learn that Nora has taken out a loan to pay for a trip to Italy necessary for her husband's health. However, she is still paying off the debt and is afraid to tell her husband the truth. Nora tries to convince Torvald to give her more money for Christmas shopping, but he is reluctant to do so, as he believes they should be careful with their finances.

We are also introduced to Dr Rank, a family friend who loves Nora but knows he is dying of venereal disease. The act ends with Nora dancing the tarantella, a traditional Italian dance, to please her husband, and Dr Rank leaves after confessing his love for her. Through Act I, we see Nora's dependence on her husband and concern for appearances, which sets up the conflicts that will drive the rest of the play.

Act II is the central act of the play, where the conflict that has been building up since Act 1 comes to a head. The act opens with Nora anxiously waiting for Krogstad, a lawyer who had given her the loan to pay for her husband's health, to arrive. Nora's anxiety stems from the fact that she has forged her father's signature on loan, which is a serious crime. Krogstad arrives and confronts Nora about the loan, threatening to reveal the forgery to

her husband unless she convinces him to keep Krogstad's job at the bank. Krogstad had been dismissed by Torvald, but Nora persuaded her husband to reconsider and keep Krogstad employed. Nora believes that this will appease Krogstad and that he will destroy the evidence of her forgery.

However, things quickly spiral out of control as Torvald reads Krogstad's letter, which reveals the truth about Nora's forgery. Torvald is outraged and berates Nora for her dishonesty, saying that he can no longer love her as he did before. Nora pleads with Torvald, telling him that she committed the forgery for his sake and is willing to take the blame for her actions. However, Torvald is only concerned with Nora's actions' effect on his reputation and social standing. The act ends with Nora realising that her life has been a lie and that she has been living as a doll in *A Doll's House*, playing the role of a subservient wife to please her husband and society's expectations. Nora decides she can no longer live this way and must leave her husband and children to find herself and her independence.

Act 3 of the play is the final act and provides the resolution to the conflicts that have been building up throughout the previous acts. The act opens with Nora packing her things to leave her husband and children, as she feels she can no longer live as a doll in A Doll's House. Torvald initially tries to convince Nora to stay, saying that he will forgive her and forget about her forgery. However, Nora sees through his words and realises he is only concerned with his reputation and social standing. Nora tells Torvald that she no longer loves him, as she has realized that he has never truly loved her for who she is.

The climax of the play comes when Nora decides to leave, and Torvald reacts with anger and threats, saying that she cannot leave him and that he will take care of everything. However, Nora stands up to Torvald and asserts her independence, saying that she must find herself and her own identity, even if it means leaving her family behind. The play ends with Nora walking out on Torvald, leaving him and her children behind. The final scene suggests that Nora is unsure of her future but is determined to find herself and live her life on her terms rather than as a doll in *A Doll's House*.

The play is a groundbreaking work that challenged the social norms of its time by portraying a strong and independent female character who defies the expectations of her husband and society. The play is still widely performed today and is considered a modern drama masterpiece.

Recap

- ▶ Henrik Ibsen was a major Norwegian playwright of the late 19th century.
- ▶ Plays depicted realistic contemporary European bourgeois lives.
- ▶ Plays with open-ended settings
- ▶ Discussed familial and social issues
- ▶ He broke the conventional standards in plays.
- ▶ Father of realism
- ▶ Father of modern drama
- ▶ Wrote dramas based on Norwegian history in the first phase
- ▶ Wrote epic dramas in the second phase
- ▶ Focused attention in writing plays dealing with social issues in the third phase
- ▶ Symbolic plays in the fourth phase
- ▶ His plays addressed social issues, political corruption, and changing role of women.
- ▶ Psychological conflicts
- ▶ He gave emphasis to character over the plot.
- ▶ His themes frequently deal with financial and moral dilemmas.
- ▶ He combined colloquial dialogue, objectivity, and plot tightness in his plays.
- ▶ A Doll's House is a play written by Henrik Ibsen in 1879 and is one of the most performed plays in the world.
- ▶ The play addresses issues of gender, identity, and power in the context of a 19th-century middle-class family.
- ▶ The conflict of the play centers around Nora's secret debt and her forgery of her father's signature.
- ▶ A Doll's House challenged the social norms of its time by portraying a strong and independent female character.

Objective Questions

1. When was Henrik Ibsen born?
2. Where was Ibsen born?
3. When did Ibsen start working as a pharmacist's apprentice?
4. Which town did he go to become an apprentice to a pharmacist?
5. When did Ibsen start writing plays?
6. What influenced Ibsen in his early periods?
7. Whose works influenced Ibsen?
8. At what age did Ibsen write his first play?

9. What was the name of his first play?
10. What was the genre of his first play?
11. What pseudonym did he use when composing his first play?
12. What was the title of his first staged play?
13. Where did Ibsen work as a writer, director, and producer?
14. Where did Ibsen go on his self-imposed exile?
15. What was Ibsen's writing style?
16. Who were influenced by Ibsen?
17. When and where did Ibsen died?
18. What did Ibsen's plays show?
19. How is Henrik Ibsen popularly known as?
20. What did Ibsen write during his early years?
21. What did Ibsen write between the 1860s and the 1870s?
22. When was A Doll's House written?
23. Who is the protagonist of A Doll's House?
24. What did Dr. Rank confess to Nora?
25. How does the play end?

Answers

1. 1828
2. Norway
3. At the age of fifteen
4. Grimstad
5. At the age of fifteen
6. Norwegian folk tales
7. Henrik Wergeland, Peter Christen Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moeardently
8. At the age of 20
9. *Catiline*
10. Tragedy
11. Brynjolf Bjarme
12. *The Burial Mound*
13. At Det norske theatre in Bergen, Norway
14. Sorrento in Italy

15. Realism

16. James Joyce, George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and Eugene O'Neill

17. 1906 at Kristiania

18. Realistic and contemporary European bourgeois life

19. The father of realism and the father of modern drama

20. He composed verse dramas about Norwegian history.

21. Epic dramas

22. 1879

23. Nora, Torvald Helmer's wife.

24. His love to Nora

25. The play ends with Nora walking out on Torvald.

Assignments

1. Write a brief biographical note about Henrik Ibsen?
2. In what ways did Henrik Ibsen transform the conventions of traditional drama?
3. Trace the various periods in the writing career of Henrik Ibsen.
4. Why is Henrik Ibsen considered the 'Father of Modern Drama'?
5. Briefly discuss the themes taken up by Henrik Ibsen in his plays.
6. Write a brief note about the main characters in *A Doll's House*?
7. What is the play *A Doll's House* about? Discuss briefly.

Suggested Readings

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Unit 3
A Doll's House
– Themes and Characterisation

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ define what is meant by theme and its importance in a literary work
▶ describe the major themes employed in the play *A Doll's House*
▶ acquire a general idea about characterisation and its importance in a play
▶ analyse the characterisation employed in the play *A Doll's House*

Prerequisites

M.H. Abrams defines a theme as "a general concept or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, that an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader." That is, as a literary device, the theme carries the main idea or underlying meaning a writer explores in a literary work, such as novel, drama, poem, short story, and other genres of literature.

A literary work's theme can be communicated through its characters, setting, dialogue, plot, or a combination of all of these elements. Rather than overtly or directly mentioning the work's theme, this allows the reader or audience to perceive and interpret it. A theme will help readers or audience gain a better understanding of the literary work and can often be applied outside of the literary work to gain a better understanding of the world. Themes are often susceptible to the reader's or audience's perception and interpretation. That is, the reader may come across multiple themes in a work of literature, which may serve as the primary or secondary theme. The reader or audience may occasionally pick up on themes that the author did not intend to convey. In this way, theme enables literature to remain meaningful and dynamic so that it can be revisited and analysed endlessly by a large number of readers at once or by a single reader over time. Love, revenge, human versus nature, good versus evil, isolation, etc. are some examples of commonly used themes.

The characterisation is a literary device in literature through which authors introduce and develop characters and create images of the characters through physical traits, personalities, motivations, actions and responses. There are also stories that progress through the thought process of characters.

Characterisation is divided into two types: direct or explicit characterisation and indirect or implicit characterisation. In direct characterisation, the author himself/herself or through another character tell the readers or audience about the character and its traits. In indirect characterisation, the author invites the readers or audience to discover the character through their behaviour. That is, the audience must deduce the character's features for themselves by observing the character's thought process, behaviour, speech, manner of speaking, appearance, and manner of communication with other characters, as well as the responses of other characters. Ibsen's plays are an excellent example of indirect characterisation.

Keywords

Doctrine, literary device, main idea, perception, interpretation, direct characterisation, Indirect characterisation.

Discussion

The Drama *A Doll's House* contains several themes, some of the major themes are discussed here:

6.3.1 Themes

Sacrifices made by women/ gender bias: The female characters in the play exemplify Nora's claim that while men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have." Mrs. Linde was forced to abandon Krogstad, her true—but penniless—love, and marry a richer man in order to support her mother and two brothers. The nanny, Anne Marie had to abandon her own child in order to support herself by caring for Nora and her children. Despite being economically advantaged in comparison to the other female characters in the play, Nora leads a difficult life because society requires Torvald to be the dominant partner in the marriage. Torvald issues the rulings and disdains Nora, and Nora is forced to conceal her loan from him because she knows Torvald would never accept the idea that his wife (or any other woman) had assisted in saving his life. In addition, she must work in secret to repay her loan because it is illegal for a woman to obtain a loan without the permission of her husband at that time.

Love and Marriage: Torvald and Nora are depicted as a married couple. They refer to each other using pet names, demonstrating their affection. Mrs. Linde and Krogstad are married at the end of the play. Dr. Rank has never married, and he confesses his love for Nora, despite the fact that she is married.

Deception: Deception is another major theme in the play. In order to obtain a loan, Nora forges her dying father's signature. Krogstad assists her in all of this and then uses it to blackmail her later on. Nora never tells her husband about it because society does not allow women to borrow money. She then tells her friend Mrs. Linde, who advises her to tell her husband because a proper marriage is not built through deception, and true to her word, when Nora's husband discovers this, her marriage will inevitably fall apart. Krogstad also has a bad reputation because he assists Nora in forging the documents.

6.3.2 Characterisation

Characterisation is another major literary device in *A Doll's House*. In the drama, Ibsen uses the method of indirect characterisation to

define characters. Ibsen portrays the characters in the play as being strictly bound to the roles that society assigns them.

Some of the major characters in the play are discussed here:

Nora Helmer: The protagonist Nora Helmer is initially presented as naïve and carefree who lacks information about the outside world. She is depicted as a spendthrift through the character of Torvald. She happily accepts Torvald's pet names for her, which include "skylark," "songbird," "squirrel," and "pet." Torvald also refers to her and treats her like a child, for example, by forbidding her from eating macaroons, which she does despite her promises of total obedience to him. The animal and child imagery both reflect Nora's seemingly innocent, carefree nature and imply that her husband does not regard her as a proper adult because she is a woman. Nora also has some self-doubt, which she attributes to being treated like a doll her whole childhood. She is frequently reminded by Torvald that she is a "prodigal", a spendthrift, "just like your father". She also shows her lack of confidence to her husband by saying, "I wish I had inherited more of papa's good qualities." Her uncertainty is also visible in her haste to paint a lovely and ideal picture of her life for Mrs. Linde, telling her right away that she has three beautiful children and that her husband now has a wonderful job at the bank.

But as the play progresses, it is revealed that Nora is not as silly as her husband, Torvald, assumes. When Nora realises that her perception of herself, her husband, her marriage, and even her society is incorrect, she decides that she can no longer be happy in her current situation and decides to leave her husband, Torvald. Nora's final change into a mature, brave, fearless, and independent lady is an important aspect of her character.

When she realises that her husband is not the protector or saviour he claims to be and sees through his apparent hypocrisy, she instantly abandons her position as his little "doll." She plans to travel and learn more about the world so that she can find a better understanding of herself. In the end, Nora turns out to be a more confident and empowered woman who has broken free from the constraints of her past existence.

Nora's character is incredibly complicated. She is crafty yet innocent, shy and insecure yet tremendously daring, defenceless but fiercely independent, manipulative and covert at first but bold and forthright at the end. But, until her metamorphosis, she seems to be performing two roles: one of her own self and another of her husband's doll.

Hence, her persona as the doll is the weak, unassertive, dependent, and secretive side of herself, which she abandons as soon as she realises that being Helmer's doll serves no purpose and causes her more harm than benefit. Nora represents feminism and all downtrodden women who are patronised and denied their freedom and self-identity.

She therefore represents every woman's right to personal independence and individuality, and she defies the preconception that a woman's sole responsibility is to her children and her marriage.

Torvald Helmer: Torvald Helmer is a lawyer when the play starts and towards the end, he is promoted as Bank Manager. He is very affectionate towards Nora, but he often treats her more as a pet, child, or object than as a real person. He enjoys being Nora's guardian, guide, and instructor, and he prefers to have total control over her. His passion to teach Nora the tarantella dance demonstrates this.

Torvald appears to be in command of every area of her life, making choices about what she should eat, how she should move, and so on. He regards his wife Nora as an object of his desire, a piece of property over which he has unlimited control. "I've often wished that you could be threatened by some imminent danger so that I could risk everything I had—even my life itself—to save you." He imagines himself as a saviour to Nora.

Torvald's high sense of self is another crucial character feature. He regards himself as an idealistic, morally honest person with unquestioned morality. Torvald believes that the role of a man in marriage is to protect and guide his wife. He is straightforward and traditional in his beliefs about marriage and society. Torvald's obsession with reputation and appearances is highlighted by his focus on status and being treated as superior by people such as Nils Krogstad. Torvald is acutely aware of how people see him and his place in the community. He states that he refuses Nora's request to retain Krogstad at the office since doing so would make him a "laughingstock before the entire staff." Torvald's response to Nora's dishonesty also illustrates his desire for society's respect. Despite the fact that he claims Nora has damaged his happiness and will not be permitted to raise the children, he insists on her staying in the house since his primary priority is maintaining "the image" of their household.

Nils Krogstad: Nils Krogstad is portrayed as an antagonist at the beginning of the play. He is portrayed as an unscrupulous and dishonest man who threatens and blackmails the Helmers. He, too, has committed the crime of forgery in the past, an act for which he did not go to prison but which damaged his reputation and made it exceedingly difficult for him to get a good profession. Later in the play, it is revealed that he once had feelings for Kristine Linde, who later married another man. This has made him lost and unhappy in his marriage, and is the reason behind his moral corruption.

Towards the end of the play, Nil Krogstad is revealed as capable of compassion when he shows mercy towards Nora. He is presented as one who is coerced into morally dubious behaviour by society's rigid and unforgiving forces.

Mrs. Kristine Linde: Mrs. Kristine Linde is presented as an independent woman in contrast to Nora. Kristine had experienced some misfortunes and trials in her life, which drove her to work in order to provide for her family and herself. Kristine is credited with breaking the stereotype of women as subservient and docile objects of male attention. However, by the end of the play, she desires to be with Krogstad for love and security.

Dr. Rank: Torvald's best friend, Dr. Rank is unconcerned about what others think of him. Dr. Rank has spinal tuberculosis, which he believes is the result of his father's vices. He is unmarried and lonely, and it is revealed throughout the play that he is in love with Nora. His view towards life is cynical.

Recap

- ▶ Theme as a general concept or doctrine
- ▶ The theme carries the main idea or underlying meaning.
- ▶ The theme helps in a better understanding of a literary work.
- ▶ Themes are susceptible to the reader's or audience's perception and interpretation.
- ▶ The theme helps literature to remain meaningful and dynamic.
- ▶ The characterisation is a literary device.
- ▶ Characterisation helps in the introduction and development of characters in a play
- ▶ Characterisation is of two types, direct and indirect.
- ▶ Direct characterisation - author introduces the character
- ▶ Indirect characterisation – understanding character through behaviour
- ▶ Nora claims hundreds of thousands of women have sacrificed their integrity.
- ▶ Mrs. Linde was forced to abandon Krogstad.
- ▶ Anne Marie had to abandon her children to care for Nora and her children.
- ▶ Love and marriage, main themes of the play
- ▶ Deceptions as another major theme
- ▶ The indirect characterisation in *A Doll's House*
- ▶ Nora is presented as a naïve and carefree character.
- ▶ Torvald is straightforward and traditional in his beliefs.
- ▶ Nils Krogstad is portrayed as an unscrupulous and dishonest man.
- ▶ Mrs. Linde is depicted as independent in contrast with Nora.
- ▶ Dr. Rank is presented as a cynical person.

Objective Questions

1. What is a theme?
2. What does the theme contain?
3. How are themes conveyed?
4. What is the function of the theme?
5. What is characterisation?
6. What are the different types of characterisations?
7. What type of characterisation is used in *A Doll's House*?
8. What are the major themes in *A Doll's House*?
9. Why Kristine Linde was forced to abandon Nils Krogstad?
10. Why does Anne Marie abandon her children?

11. What kind of a character is Torvald Helmer?
12. How is Nils Krogstad portrayed in the play?
13. Who loved Kristine Linde?
14. What caused Nils Krogstad to become morally corrupt?
15. Who is presented as an independent woman in the play?
16. Which character is unconcerned about others in the play?
17. What is Dr. Rank afflicted with?

Answers

1. It is a general concept or a doctrine incorporated in a literary work.
2. The theme contains the main idea of the literary work.
3. Themes are conveyed through characters, setting, dialogue, plot, or a combination of all of these elements.
4. To make literature meaningful and dynamic.
5. The characterisation is a literary device.
6. Direct Characterisation and Indirect Characterisation.
7. Indirect Characterisation
8. Sacrifices made by women, love, marriage, and deception.
9. To help her mother and two brothers from poverty.
10. To care for Nora and her children.
11. Torvald Helmer is straightforward and traditional.
12. Nils Krogstad is portrayed as an unscrupulous and dishonest man.
13. Nils Krogstad is redeemed towards the end.
14. Kristine Linde's betrayal caused him to be morally corrupt.
15. Kristine Linde
16. Dr. Rank
17. Spinal tuberculosis

Assignments

1. Analyse and interpret the different themes in *A Doll's House*.
2. Make a list of the various types of characters used in the play *A Doll's House*.
3. Briefly examine the characterisation of Mrs. Kristine Linde in *A Doll's House*.
4. How does Nora Helmer evolve during the course of the play?
5. How does *A Doll's House* present the theme of deception?

Suggested Readings

1. Moi, Toril. *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theatre, Philosophy.* Oxford UP, 2008.
2. https://literarydevices.net/a-dolls-house-themes/
3. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-doll-s-house/themes
4. https://www.thoughtco.com/a-dolls-house-characters-4628155
5. https://www.mwalimuresources.co.ke/motes/a-dolls-house-character-and-characterization.

Unit 4
A Doll's House
– Structure and Style

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ▶ acquire a general insight into different types of structures used in drama
- ▶ acquire a general overview of the key styles used in drama
- ▶ determine the structure and style of the play *A Doll's House*
- ▶ identify the stylistic elements in the play *A Doll's House*

Prerequisites

The structure of a play or dramatic structure is a literary element. It is the framework that allows a story to unfold its plot. *Poetics*, Aristotle's text on dramatic theory, was the first written work to examine story structure. Aristotle gave primary importance to the plot. According to Aristotle, a play should have a beginning, middle and end. These divisions were later developed by a Roman grammarian and a teacher of rhetoric named Aelius Donatus. He named the parts of play protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe. This is called the three-act structure.

Later in 1863, German playwright and novelist Gustav Freytag developed Freytag's Pyramid, under which the plot is divided into five acts, which consists of exposition or introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement or conclusion. While some critics are of the opinion that the five-act structure was actually introduced by the Roman playwright Horace.

A typical dramatic structure is linear, with events taking place in chronological order. But there are nonlinear structures as well, in which the action of a play moves forward and backward in time. This is accomplished by employing flashbacks and flashforwards. This is often done to make the play more exciting or to highlight the points through contrast and juxtaposition.

As far as a drama is concerned, the term style can be difficult to define because it varies so greatly from one work of literature to the next. However, in a broader sense, it means how a particular play or drama is done or presented. In other words, it is the way/ method in which the particular art form is expressed.

The style makes a play or an author distinct and unique from other playwrights and dramas. Theatrical styles are influenced by time and place, artistic and other social structures, and the individual style of the artist or artists, which includes tone, word choice, grammar, language, and descriptive technique, to name a few. Drama or play employs a variety of theatrical styles. Some examples include naturalism, realism, expressionism and surrealism.

Keywords

Plot, Exposition, Complication, Denouement, Vernacular

Discussion:

A Doll's House, The play is written in three acts to tell the story, thereby breaking the conventional plot structure. The three acts are divided into an exposition/rising action in the first act, a complication in the second act, and a discussion in the third act. Nora's conversations with Helmer, Mrs. Linde, and Krogstad in Act I tell us everything we need to know about how critical the situation is. The situation is developed and complicated in Act II. Nora tries to find a way out, first by convincing Helmer to change his mind, then by enlisting the assistance of Dr. Rank. When all of her possible solutions fail, the action reaches a climax.

Act III leads to the climax, in which Ibsen builds suspense by hinting at a resolution. Krogstad's change of mind could imply that the letter will be destroyed. Then Ibsen eliminates that possibility by having Mrs. Linde decide to expose the truth. He heightens the tension by having Dr. Rank postponed Helmer's reading of the letter.

At the falling action or denouement, all the secrets are revealed and successfully resolved. But instead of a conventional plot structure that usually portrays a 'happily ever after in the end,' the play took a different turn through Nora's announcement of leaving her marriage and children, making the ending of the play open-ended. The play also contains a subplot, but it is integrated so flawlessly into the main plot. The play's structural coherence is unaffected by the subplot featuring Krista and Mrs. Linde.

The writing style of the play *A Doll's House* demonstrates the writer's straightforward and convincing approach. In this play, Ibsen portrays his characters and incidents from a real-life point of view, which the audience can often relate with their contemporary life and society. The characters in this play communicate in everyday language. Ibsen's use of vernacular language in the play makes it a realistic and relatable experience for the viewers.

The plot technique of juxtaposition combines contrasting individuals or circumstances. For this reason, it is also necessary to make some personalities and circumstances analogous or parallel. The similarities between the characters increase the contrasts in this way. Nora and Mrs. Linde are opposites in *A Doll's House*, and Helmer is represented opposite to Krogstad.

The contrast between Nora and Mrs. Linde are the most evident. Mrs. Linde begins as a tragic widow but later transforms into a blissfully contented wife of Krogstad; Nora begins as a happy wife but turns out to be a tragic character by the end of the drama. Nora initially appears to be a doll, a lovely and fascinating object of entertainment, but she later reveals that she is truly intelligent, searching for her identity and dignity, and she eventually leaves her home at the end of the play. Mrs. Linde is a severe and independent woman who initially leads a serious life, but she eventually manages to assume the character of a romantic young wife who is happily dependent.

Krogstad is contrasted with Torvald Helmer. Despite being a classmate of Krogstad, Helmer is a conservative, inflexible, and uncaring egotist. Although Krogstad is generally considered to be the antagonist of the play, he is empathetic in sentiment, progressive in thought, flexible in attitude, and not rigid in his beliefs. It is unexpected that Krogstad attempts to alleviate Nora's worries following his blackmailing. He arrives and informs Nora that his main goal is to regain his job through blackmailing her husband, who has been so heartless as to fire his classmate without a valid reason.

A Doll's House is noted for its use of irony as a technique. Dramatic irony is a technique used in theatre to create a contrast between appearance and reality, between what appears to be the case, the situation, or the message, and what is actually the case. A speaker may use irony consciously or unconsciously. When a remark is intentionally ironic, it conveys the complete opposite of what it appears to mean.

We can see Ibsen using irony on multiple different instances. Nora tells Mrs. Linde in the beginning of the play that she and Helmer have had a tremendous stroke of luck because Helmer has been appointed the manager of a bank, that he will now be receiving a huge salary and lots of benefits. But the real incidents in the play, which we understand in the course of the play, prove just opposite of what was expected. Retrospection, or turning back on the past to gain knowledge and understanding, is another element that the plot is built around. Many issues related to Nora, Helmer and Krogstad in the play are disclosed through the technique of retrospection.

A Doll's House can be dubbed a modern tragedy because it differs from classic tragedies in that it features a tragic flaw in the protagonist, who is normally a hero. In reality, *A Doll's House* ends with a new beginning rather than total collapse. Old values are broken as Nora's illusionary world comes crashing down, yet Nora appears to have succeeded in our eyes at least by acquiring knowledge and courage.

Recap

- ▶ The structure of a play or dramatic structure is a literary element.
- ▶ The structure of a play helps in unfolding the plot.
- ▶ Aristotle's text on dramatic theory– the first written work to examine story structure
- ▶ Aristotle gave primary importance to the plot.
- ▶ A play should have a beginning, middle, and an end – Aristotle.
- ▶ A play should have a protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe – Aelius Donatus.

- ▸ In 1863, Gustav Freytag developed Freytag's Pyramid.
- ▸ Freytag's Pyramid – Five acts- exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement
- ▸ Usually, dramatic structure is linear - actions taking place in a chronological order
- ▸ Non-linear structure – play moves forwards and backward in time
- ▸ Style varies from one work of literature to the next.
- ▸ Style is the method in which a particular work is presented.
- ▸ Style makes a play or an author distinct and unique.
- ▸ Style is influenced by time, place, artistic, and other social structures.
- ▸ Different types of theatrical styles are naturalism, realism, expressionism, surrealism
- ▸ The play *A Doll's House* consists of three acts.
- ▸ Exposition in the first act, complication in the second act, resolution in the third act
- ▸ Nora's conversations with Helmer, Mrs. Linde, and Krogstad reveal the critical situation
- ▸ The situation is developed through Nora's failed attempts to convince Torvald in Act II.
- ▸ Act III leads to the climax where Ibsen complicates the story further.
- ▸ At the falling action or denouement, all the secrets are revealed and successfully resolved.
- ▸ Nora's announcement of leaving her marriage and children makes the ending of the play open-ended.
- ▸ The writing style is straightforward and convincing.

Objective Questions

1. What is dramatic structure?
2. Which is the first written text that examines story structure?
3. Who wrote *Poetics*?
4. According to Aristotle, what should a play have?
5. Who was Aelius Donatus?
6. According to Aelius Donatus, what does a play consist of?
7. Who was Gustav Freytag?
8. According to Freytag's pyramid, what should a plot have?
9. What are the two types of dramatic structures?
10. How do events take place in linear dramatic structure?

11. How do events take place in a non-linear dramatic structure?

12. What is a style in literature?

13. What makes an author or a play distinct and unique?

14. How many acts does the play *A Doll's House* have?

15. What does Act I of the play reveal?

16. What happens in Act II?

17. What is the writing style of the play?

Answers

1. It is a literary element that functions as a framework that allows the plot of a story to unfold

2. Poetics

3. Aristotle

4. A beginning, middle, and an end

5. A roman grammarian and teacher of rhetoric

6. Protasis, epitasis and catastrophe

7. A German playwright and novelist

8. An introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement

9. Linear dramatic structure and non-linear dramatic structure

10. In chronological order

11. Forward as well as backward manner in time

12. Style is the method by which a particular literary work is presented

13. Style

14. Three

15. The first act reveals the situation of the play

16. The situation becomes complicated

17. Realistic

Assignments

1. Make a detailed examination of the structure of the play *A Doll's House*.

2. Explore the different types of theatrical styles in Modern Drama.

3. How does the plot of *A Doll's House* break the conventional structure of a play?

4. Elaborate on the exposition or rising action in *A Doll's House*.

5. Discuss the falling action or denouement in *A Doll's House.*

6. Analyse the structure of *A Doll's House* on the basis of Aelius Donatus' protasis, epitasis, and catastrophe.

Suggested Readings

1. Hornby, Richard. *Script into Performance: A Structuralist Approach.* Hal Leonard Corporation,1995.
2. Krutch, Joseph Wood. "Modernism" *Modern Drama, A Definition and an Estimate*. Cornell U P, 1953.
3. Mencken, H. L. *The Collected Drama of H. L. Mencken: Plays and Criticism*. Scarecrow Press, 2012.

Unit 5
A Doll's House
– Critical Perspectives on the Play

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

▶ get introduced to the concept of critical perspective
▶ familiarise themselves with the different types of critical perspectives
▶ critically analyse the stylistic elements in the play
▶ recognise the relevance of critiquing the selected text

Prerequisites

The term 'critical' comes from the Greek word 'to judge'; and the term 'perspective' is derived from the Latin word for 'optical'. Modern philosophy is built on critical perspectives. A critical perspective entails adopting a point of view that questions the logic and authenticity of something. It is the process of looking at a particular subject from various sides or perspectives, rather than just one's own, without judgement, but with the intent of gaining a better and deeper understanding of the subject. This is what critical perspective is all about.

The goal of a critical perspective is to remove standard prejudices from a single point of view in order to determine which conclusion is the most valid and suitable. To accomplish this, the topic must be closely examined.

Formalism, structuralism, psychoanalytical criticism, archetypal criticism, feminist criticism, gender theory, Marxist criticism, new historicism, etc. are some of the examples of critical perspectives.

Keywords

Structural analysis, Unity of action, Feminist, Patriarchal dominance, Stereotype, Symbolic, Social criticism

Discussion:

A Doll's House is considered a classic of modern drama. A structural analysis of the play reveals that it follows a traditional three-act structure, with each act containing one long scene. This structure helps to create a solid foundation for the story and allows the events of the play to be presented in a clear and organized manner.

In addition to the three-act structure, the play also features a strong sense of unity of action. This means that each action and inaction taken by the characters has a significant impact on the course of events that follow. This unity of action helps to create a sense of cause-and-effect throughout the play, making it more engaging for readers or viewers. The scenes in the play are mostly two-person scenes, with brief appearances and exits by other characters. This focus on two-person scenes allows the characters to engage in deep and meaningful conversations, and allows the audience to fully understand the motivations and perspectives of each character.

From a feminist perspective, the play stands out as a bold critique of the patriarchal social structure prevalent in the nineteenth century, particularly in the domestic sphere. Through the character of Nora, Ibsen provides a scathing commentary on the subjugation of women to men.

Nora's character is presented as a stereotypical representation of women in the patriarchal society of the time. She is expected to be a dutiful wife and mother, to cater to her husband's every whim and fancy, and to remain subservient to him in all aspects of life. Her life is devoid of any individuality or self-expression, and she is content to live within the confines of her husband's wishes. However, as the play progresses, we witness Nora's gradual awakening to the oppressive nature of her circumstances.

Through Nora, Ibsen highlights the inherent flaws in the patriarchal system that treats women as inferior beings, with no voice of their own. Nora's husband, Torvald, embodies the patriarchal ideology of the time, where men held complete authority over women, and women were expected to be nothing more than docile, obedient creatures. Torvald's patronising and domineering behaviour towards Nora underscores the oppressive nature of the patriarchal society in which she lives.

The play also highlights the impact of societal expectations on women, with Nora's character representing the struggles faced by women in trying to conform to societal norms. Ibsen's portrayal of Nora as a woman who is forced to hide her true self from the world captures the essence of the feminist struggle for equality and liberation from patriarchal oppression.

Nora Helmer undergoes a transformation from a naive, childlike woman to a strong, independent individual. Initially, Nora is content with her life as a housewife and mother, but as she gets to know her husband, Torvald, better, she becomes more self-conscious and aware of her own position in the household. She realizes that Torvald views her as an object or possession rather than an equal partner in their marriage.

Nora's final decision to leave Torvald is a bold assertion of her individual freedom and self-respect. It is a clear message that a woman has her own mind and her own sense of self, and that her husband should not take her for granted. Ibsen uses Nora's departure as a symbol of women's emancipation from societal expectations and limitations.

The slamming of the door at the end of the play is a powerful visual image that conveys Nora's rejection of the role that society has assigned to her as a wife and mother. It also represents her rejection of Torvald's attempts to control her and treat her as his possession. The door slamming shut symbolizes the end of Nora's old life and the beginning of a new, more independent one. It is a statement that women have the right to live their lives on their own terms and be respected as individuals.

The play's social criticism is multifaceted and highlights a number of issues with traditional notions of marriage, husband-wife relationships, and male dominance over women. Firstly, the play critiques the idea of marriage as a social institution that is expected to bring happiness and stability to individuals and society as a whole. Through the portrayal of the dysfunctional relationships of the characters, the play suggests that marriage can be a source of unhappiness and frustration, particularly for women who are expected to conform to traditional gender roles.

Moreover, the play exposes the power dynamics within husband-wife relationships, revealing how men often use their positions of authority to control and dominate their partners. This is particularly evident in the character of Torvald, who treats his wife Nora as a child and a possession rather than as an equal partner in the marriage.

The play also critiques the idea of romantic love as the basis for marriage and family, suggesting that it can be a dangerous and destructive force that masks deeper issues of inequality and oppression. Through Nora's decision to leave her husband and children at the end of the play, the play suggests that women must be able to assert their independence and autonomy, even if it means going against societal norms and expectations.

In doing so, the play challenges the so-called values that were once thought to keep the family happy and society civilised, suggesting that they may actually be harmful and oppressive to women. Overall, the play functions as a powerful social critique that exposes the flaws and contradictions within traditional notions of marriage and family.

Recap

- ▶ *A Doll's House* is a classic modern drama with a traditional three-act structure.
- ▶ The play features a strong sense of unity of action and cause-and-effect throughout.
- ▶ The focus on two-person scenes allows for deep and meaningful conversations and character development.
- ▶ The play critiques the patriarchal social structure prevalent in the nineteenth century, particularly in the domestic sphere.
- ▶ Nora's character represents the struggles faced by women in conforming to societal norms.
- ▶ Nora undergoes a transformation from a naive woman to a strong, independent individual.
- ▶ Nora's decision to leave Torvald is a bold assertion of her individual freedom and self-respect.

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- The slamming of the door at the end symbolizes Nora's rejection of societal expectations and limitations.
- The play critiques traditional notions of marriage, husband-wife relationships, and male dominance over women.
- The play challenges the values that were once thought to keep the family happy and society civilised, exposing flaws and contradictions.

Objective Questions

1. Where does the term 'critical' come from?
2. Where does the term 'perspective' come from?
3. How many acts contain in *A Doll's House*?
4. What is a significant feature of modern drama?
5. What is the significance of three-act play?
6. Which classical unity is followed in *A Doll's House*?
7. What social practice is critiqued through the character of Nora?
8. What does Torvald view Nora as?
9. Why is the 'slamming of the door' at the end of the play significant?
10. Why is 'romantic love' critiqued as a basis for marriage within the play?

Answers

1. It comes from the Greek word, 'to judge'
2. It comes from the Latin word 'optical'
3. Three
4. Three act plays
5. Three acts in plays create a solid foundation by keeping the pieces of the play in balance
6. Unity of action
7. Subjugation of women by men
8. An object or possession
9. It symbolises the end of Nora's old life and the beginning of a new, independent life
10. It is revealed to mask deeper issues of inequality and oppression

Assignments

1. Examine *A Doll's House* from a feminist perspective.
2. Write a detailed critical analysis of *A Doll's House*.
3. Examine the dramatic structure of *A Doll's House*.
4. Does *A Doll's House* uphold the assertion of Nora's individual freedom and self-respect? Support your answer with instances from the play.
5. How does *A Doll's House* challenge the domestic values of nineteenth century European society.

Suggested Readings

1. "Analysis of Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House," *Literariness*, 27 Jul. 2020, https://literariness.org/2020/07/27/analysis-of-henrik-ibsens-a-dolls-house/.

2. English Literature Network. "A Doll's House: Critical Analysis." *English Literature Network*, 2022, https://englishliterature.net/notes/a-dolls-house-critical-analysis.

3. "Interpreting Texts from a Critical Perspective." *Study.com*, https://study.com/academy/lesson/interpreting-texts-from-a-critical-perspective.html.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

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